

ALEXANDER PIATIGORSKY

Mythological Deliberations

*Lectures on the Phenomenology
of Myth*

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES
University of London

**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion

XV

The Louis H. Jordan Bequest

The will of the Rev. Louis H. Jordan provided that the greater part of his estate should be paid over to the School of Oriental and African Studies to be employed for the furtherance of studies in Comparative Religion, to which his life had been devoted. Part of the funds which thus became available was to be used for the endowment of a Louis H. Jordan Lectureship in Comparative Religion. The lecturer is required to deliver a course of lectures for subsequent publication. The first series of lectures was delivered in 1951.

JORDAN LECTURES 1992

Mythological Deliberations

*Lectures on the Phenomenology
of Myth*

by

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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN
STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

1993

Published by
SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square,
London WC1H 0HG

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 0-203-98521-4 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-7286-0211-3 (Print Edition)

To Audrey Cantlie

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FOREWORD

THESE lectures are comparative, albeit in a very limited sense, that is, in the sense that any *thinking* on myth *is* comparative. For any thinking on something as a myth, as well as on a myth as something, has already presupposed the existence of at least one more myth or one more thing other than the myth or thing we have begun with in our thinking. Comparison here is a comparison of thoughts and not necessarily of the concrete historical, geographical, ethnic and religious contexts of these thoughts, my own included. A phenomenology of myth implies its de-contextualization, and leaves the task of re-settling the myths, which were interpreted in this way, in their original contexts, to the classical, non-phenomenological mythologist.

It is my genuine wish to publish these lectures as lectures, i.e., in the form they were delivered in May 1992, and without changing or reworking them into a monograph, all chapters of which are systematically connected. In presenting them as lectures I have no point to prove and no incentive to be convincing. I simply want to share my thoughts on myth with those also wishing to reflect on it in their spare time. I hope I did not stretch the lecturer's license too far. And I apologize for discrepancies, contradictions and repetitions.

I wish to thank those in the School who helped me along in my speculative endeavours concerning myth, as well as in my attempt to make them available for students and postgraduates. Particularly I am indebted to Timothy Barrett, Humphrey Fisher, Richard Gray, Gerald Hawting, Tudor Parfitt, John Wansbrough and Simon Weightman. I am also deeply thankful to Charlotte Freeman for her comments on Lectures Three and Four, to Martin Daly for the painstaking business of publication, and to Nora Shane and Joan Ridgewell for their aid in the preparation of the first version.

LECTURE ONE

Thinking on Myth as Plot and Time

(*A preliminary phenomenological excursus*)

The value of information
does not survive the moment
in which it was new. A story
is different. It does not
expend itself.

Walter Benjamin

Mythology is given to us in
the disconnected fragments
of our thought. Their
re-connection would mean
history.

I.Beshtau

1

ABOUT THINKING ON MYTHOLOGY

When I think about mythology I know that myth is me, my thought, speech and behaviour. But this is so only if, while thinking about myth or even prior to that thinking, I have already had the idea of the mythical as something other than me, my thought, speech and behaviour—in other words, as a kind of notion (scientific, scholarly or theological) which, however vague and indefinite, corresponds to an even more vague and indefinite *objectivity* called ‘myth’ and a discipline called ‘mythology’.

At the same time, when I think about my own thought, speech and behaviour, I know, even without any prior knowledge, however superficial and elementary, of mythology as a discipline and of myth as its object, that some, at least, of my thoughts, words and acts are subject

to certain patterns and forms which I see exactly, literally almost, reproduced in other people's events, occurrences and situations. And then, by a simple extrapolation, I arrive, in my thinking, at the idea that—barring a solipsistic surmise that external reality is a reflection of, or derivation from, my own thinking—these forms and patterns constitute, themselves, that which is *other* than my individuality, as well as the individuality of other people. And if so, then I know that I am that other, which, as soon as the notions of myth and mythology are *post factum* (*factum* is the fact of my thinking here) appropriated by me, is the mythological; the mythological in the sense of being neither individual nor non-individual, so that in this case I am myth. For if in the first case ('myth is me') my thinking was directed to myth and then from myth to myself, in the second it was directed to myself and, then, to myth.

In both cases, however, I have performed in my thinking two main operations: the first, an objectification, or changing my thinking into that which, while being an object of thinking, ceases to be a 'thinking subject', and the second, a reflection, or thinking on this very thinking as thinking at the moment of its being thought on. In the sense of the first operation, my or anybody else's thinking, once thought of as 'mythological', loses its psychological character and becomes 'another object'. In the sense of the second operation, while thinking of my or anybody else's thinking as thinking, i.e., while *reflecting* on thinking, I am depriving, therewith, my reflexive thinking of its psychological characteristics. So the first operation 'de-psychologizes' the mythological object, whereas the second de-psychologizes the reflexing mythologist. The result of the first, then, will be 'another object' posited or fixed as mythological knowledge, and the result of the second, also another object posited or fixed as mythological state of consciousness.¹

¹ That is why the difference between the 'mythical' and the 'mythologically described' (or 'describable') might seem to be evident psychologically only as long as I approach a myth (or something *as* a myth) as a thinking *absolutely other* than mine; that is, when my perception of the mythological and my thinking of it are not yet reduced ('re-ducted') to their phenomenological basis and, thereby, de-naturalized and de-psychologized. But as soon as we have performed an elementary procedure of hermeneutical understanding whereby both myth and mythology are re-ducted to one (broadly speaking) mythological thinking and the 'other' or 'another' thinking becomes the most basic idea of mythology, the difference between myth and mythology is made redundant.

This, of course, calls into question the very position of ‘external observer’ of myth, in the first place, and the idea of ‘object’ of observation or, for that matter, of the ‘objective’, in the second.² Neither is regarded as absolute here. An observer remains an observer only for the length of time of his observation of a given concrete object—a text, an episode, a situation, or a state. An object remains the same object only as long as it is observed in a certain way already defined or described by an observer. The term ‘the objective’ is used not as much in opposition to ‘the subjective’ as to stress the relative stability of an object in its relation to an observer or to other objects.³

2

THREE PLOTS: A DEMONSTRATION

These theoretical remarks about thinking on myth stand as an introduction to its possible phenomenology. In making this attempt we cannot start with ourselves and with our consciousness and thinking in relation to myth alone, but with the concrete subject (or theme) of our thinking—the myths themselves. So, let us set out on our lengthy mythological journey with three highly condensed plots of three stories

² The position of the external observer (the investigator of religion, the mythologist, etc.) is not considered here as in any way natural or taken as a matter of fact. On the contrary, it is introduced as a result of a very specific phenomenological work (or procedure) which implies *three*, and not two, possible conscious stands, namely: (1) the stand of the observed; (2) the stand of the observer; (3) the stand which, though constructed by the observer, is conceived by him as more general than 1 and 2, comprising them both as its two particular cases. This, of course, does not mean that the stand of the observed cannot, in its turn, admit the stand of an external observer of its own (2) or even its own general stand (3) as well. But then I, as an external observer, would have to *shift* my position of observation from 2 to 3 and, thereby, to construct ‘another’ third stand. Thus, these three stands seem to be typical *shifters*, for they can be fixed only during a given phenomenological procedure.

³ That we cannot *produce* a myth suggests its *objectivity* as does the fact that we can reproduce or re-enact it. This is not a mythological postulate but, rather, a simple empirical (i.e., non-theoretical) assumption which stresses the ‘one-ness’ of subject and object in mythology. For neither the narrator of a myth nor its protagonists can produce it, in this sense; they have it or are in it. In fact, creation of myth is as mythological as a myth of creation. Then, the only thing I can do is to reveal my attitude to myth or be conscious of it as of an objectivity (or a fact) of consciousness, whether mine or somebody else’s.

contained in three texts, then continue with some general observations on them, and only after that indulge in some phenomenological speculations concerning these plots and our observations on them.

The first story is a very well-trodden one. On the 18th of February, 3102 B.C., on the eve of the great battle on the Field of Kurus, the Field of Dharma, when the two armies were already drawn up against one another, the great warrior and chief of the Kauravas, Arjuna, requested his charioteer, friend, and distant relation, Krishna, to drive him to the centre of the field so that he could see both armies.⁴ When Krishna did so, Arjuna, seeing among the enemies his relations, old friends, and teachers, was filled with despair and said to Krishna that he would rather be killed himself or become a miserable beggar than kill those with whom he was connected by ties of blood or friendship.

Krishna explained to Arjuna that he, as well as everybody else, is Self (*ātman*), that there was no time when he or they did not exist, that there will be no time when he or they will not be existing, for Self (*ātman*) cannot kill or be killed. Passing from one body to another one's Self only changes its clothes or, as a bird, its nest, remaining always, itself, unchanged and the same.

To this Krishna added that while Arjuna, and other people, did not know their previous lives (rebirths in different bodies) he, Krishna, knew them all.

He also said that this battle on the Field of Kurus was not a simple battle, one of many, but the greatest battle that marked the end of the previous (*dvāpara*) and the beginning of the next (*kālī*) period of time (*yuga*)—the period of history proper, so to speak, and that all other battles and wars to come would be no more than superfluous and senseless imitations of this one which is witnessed (and by inference *designed*) by Him, the Highest Witness, Self of All Selves (*paramātmā*), Person of all Persons (*puruṣottama*), the Highest God.

And, finally, Krishna explained to Arjuna that he would do what he was destined to do anyway and that he would be spared to survive the carnage, so that he would be far better off doing unhesitatingly and well what he had to do. So, after having received the Divine Instruction, Arjuna duly began to fight.

⁴ *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*, text and translation by J.A.B.van Buitenen, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1981 (*The Bhagavadgita*).

The second story is almost equally well dated though considerably less well-known than the first. On the 13th of October, 1805 A.D., Napoleon reached Jena about 3 p.m., and with Marshal Lannes proceeded to Landgrafenberg to reconnoitre. He wanted to observe the positions of the enemy, but his view was restricted by thick fog to the immediate foreground. By daybreak on the 14th, more than 60,000 men stood densely packed on the narrow plateau, while below, Soult on the right, and Augereau on the left were getting into position. Prince Hohenloe had determined to drive the French into the ravines on either flank. By 10 a.m. the 19 battalions which had initiated the German attack were heavily outnumbered and drifted away from the battlefield. Their places were taken by a fresh body, but this was soon outnumbered and outflanked in its turn. By 2 p.m. the Emperor launched his guards and cavalry to complete the victory. All was over by 4 p.m.

When a German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, then residing in Jena, saw the Emperor enter the city on a white stallion his mind was struck by the lightning realization of the fact that this very moment was the end of the whole of human history, the history of struggle and confrontation of particular human interests between themselves on the one hand, and the history of struggle and confrontation between all that is particular with the general and universal, on the other. Napoleon ended this struggle with a complete victory over the particular and paved the way for a post-historical triumph of the general, homogeneous and universal. However, though he ended human history, he did not know it. Hegel's was an awareness not only of what Napoleon *did* and *was*, but also of the Absolute Idea (or Spirit) and of his own realization of it, as it was explained in the *Jena Conferences* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. So that which worked *objectively* through the Emperor, who was not aware of it, was *both* objectively *and* subjectively in Hegel who, in his realization, ended (concluded) philosophy as Napoleon concluded history. The realization of the Absolute here is *the* coincidence of one with another, of Napoleon who fought (acted) with Hegel who knew—in one place and at one time. 'That is why'—writes Kojève—"the presence of the battle of Jena in the consciousness of Hegel is so overwhelmingly important."⁵

The third story is minuscule and hardly datable. Odinn sacrificed himself to himself by piercing his body with his sacred spear and

⁵ Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990 [1947 (*Introduction*)], p. 247.

hanging himself on the Iggdrasil, the World Ash Tree (lit. 'Odinn's Horse'). On its branches he hung nine days and nights, to win the wisdom of magic runes, without bread to eat and mead to drink. After that a giant Boeltorn, his maternal grandfather, satiated Odinn with the divine mead of wisdom and presented to him the magic runes.⁶

A phenomenology of myth, understood in its most elementary sense, has, as its *object of knowledge*, the content of a text (in the form of plot or situation) as that which comprises its own *different knowledges*. This clumsy and pleonastic characterization precludes the phenomenologist from absolutising his own knowledge *in relation* to the knowledges of the protagonists and narrators in the stories he chooses for his investigation, on the one hand, and on the other it makes 'myth' a term of description of content and, thereby, relatively independent from the confines of any specific genre or literary or folklore form.

3

A DIFFERENCE IN KNOWLEDGE AND THE
DIFFERENT KNOWLEDGES

So, what do they have in common, our three plots, one from the *Mahabharata* (5–3c. B.C.?), another from the *Jena Conferences* (1806 A.D.), the third from the Elder Edda (10th c. A.D.?)? In all of them the events are events of knowledge and knowledges of events, and in all of them the differences in knowledge or the different knowledges are the main plot-generating and situation-determining factor. In the first, the great warrior, Arjuna, knew the coming battle on the Kurukshetra to be, however great, still a battle, one of many. Krishna the Lord communicated to him his knowledge of this battle as *Dharmic*, and not one of many but the only *real* battle that marks the beginning of human history. So Arjuna gained *another* knowledge or, more precisely speaking, a knowledge of this event as *another* event. In the second, the great warrior, Napoleon, knew the coming battle of Jena as, again, one of many. It was Hegel who knew that this was the last battle in human history, that Napoleon enacted the role of the first *universal monarch*, and that he, Hegel, played the role of the self-consciousness of the Absolute Spirit—he *knew* and *was*, while Napoleon only *was*, in that philosophical plot. Hegel merely saw the Emperor whose knowledge of

⁶ See *The Elder or Poetic Edda*, Part I, ed. and trans. by Olive Bray, London, 1908, p. 196–7.

the battle and of himself remained the same, while Hegel's knowledge was, at that moment, perfect and complete. That is, he could not know more than he knew, and he did not communicate what he knew to the unknowing Emperor. Thus, they would have remained worlds apart, had it not been for the Absolute Spirit in the sense of which (or, in whose 'field', so to speak) they coincided in time and space.

Napoleon as person was an *actor*, *agent*, *doer*, and so was Arjuna until a terrible despair overcame him and interrupted his action and brought him a higher knowledge of himself and his situation. Napoleon remained what he was, for there was, unbeknownst to him, *another*, i.e., Hegel as Knower—they divided, as it were, their functions on the scene of the universe: one worked and knew his work in the universe, the other knew the universe as the scene of the Absolute. Who was the third in this play?—the Absolute. In the *Bhagavadgita* we see a slightly different, though also triple, picture. Krishna as a human apparition, as Vasudeva, son of Vasudeva and Devaki, the Charioteer of Arjuna, was a manifestation of Krishna-Vishnu, the Absolute. Vasudeva, the communicator of knowledge was, in fact, not only Arjuna's knowledge, but his Self (*ātman*) too. Although, being Himself the Absolute, He could not know more or differently, because his knowledge was absolute, but he definitely could teach various people various different knowledges, while Hegel could not (he wrote about it himself) teach any knowledge other than his, for though his was the knowledge of the Absolute, he was not the Absolute. In the third case as well we have a triple structure of knowledge. Here, however, it is two knowledges of one and the same person and god, Odinn, that determine the plot. Odinn's knowledge *about* the wisdom of runes which he had not yet obtained, and his resulting knowledge of the runes brought him power over all gods, men and other beings. Beyond this is the knowledge of the whole myth of the universe, that is, of its beginning, continuation, end (*Ragnarök*), and subsequent regeneration, new beginning, etc. This 'third knowledge' which can, for convention's sake, be called 'supra-historical', figures amply in both Eddas, but one cannot be sure that it finds itself within the knowledge of Odinn, whereas in the *Bhagavadgita* Krishna's knowledge comprises all, and Hegel's knowledge does not exceed the limits of history, does not go beyond its end.

WHAT ARE WE DOING IN DOING THIS? THE
IDEA OF PURE CONTENT AND THREE
ASPECTS OF INTERPRETATION

At this juncture we are coming to the point in our introduction where we have to return to the beginning of the previous section and ask ourselves: what have we been dealing with while interpreting our three plots from the point of view of knowledge? What has been the *object* of our investigation—the plots? But a plot is not given to us as a primary object—what is given to us is a *thing* called ‘text’, and its plot is then the result of our intentional (and interpretative) conscious activity: from a text *we* abstract its content and then present that abstraction as a plot (or situation). Although, of course, a plot already presented—as in the case of the three plots above—can, in its turn, be re-presented as a text in its own right, the whole operation with the abstraction of the content and its interpretation as a plot (or situation) can be repeated again, in principle, *ad infinitum*. We return to this in more detail in Lecture Two.

Thus, whatever we do with a text—let alone its content and plot—as far as we have already begun doing it—places us within a space where two consciousnesses are inseparable, our own and that of (or *in*) the text in question, or ‘mine’ and ‘other’ consciousness. Therefore, however literal our retelling of the content of text may be, the very fact or act of our being conscious of it, of the *thematic* direction of our mind, will, thereby, be a fact or act of our generating another text, that of its interpretation, which has already become one with the first. And when I call a text (as I did at the beginning of this section), an object, all I mean is its relative objectivity, i.e., its otherness in relation to my consciousness interpreting *it* as text. Text, therefore, not only becomes an abstraction *in* our consciousness, i.e., an abstraction produced by it, but an abstraction *of* our consciousness, i.e., when it intentionally posits itself or is conscious of itself as *another*, another *thing* or, finally, *the other*. But other what? And it is here that we have to return to our plots and their knowledges again, this time in order to start understanding the *idea* of myth.

Both our warriors, Arjuna and Napoleon, coincided with their respective knowledges in space and time. Both knowledges were about the other meaning of their respective events and their places and times, and implied, therewith, a difference in knowledge or different knowledges and the dismissal of one knowledge after acquisition of another. That is, and let me repeat it, Arjuna, who did not know the

meaning of the battlefield or of the beginning of the battle or of himself taking part in the battle, that is, any meaning other than what they were and as they were, now knows, as duly instructed by Krishna, that this battlefield is the Field of Dharma, the battle is the beginning of history, and he himself is a person (*puruṣa*) and Self (*ātman*). And likewise, in the second case, it was Hegel ('instead' of Napoleon, the warrior) who recognized in the battle of Jena the end of history, in Napoleon the practical execution of the being of the Absolute, in himself the awareness of the Absolute, and in the instance of his recognition, the end of philosophy.

However, even if we do not know, in each of these cases, what was the difference between the previous (or 'natural') knowledge (that is, the knowledge that Kurukshetra and Jena are geographical places, battle is battle, I is I, etc.) and the subsequent (or 'supernatural') one, we know from the content of the texts that there is a difference in knowledge, that there is an event of the change of one's knowledge, that that event is connected in time and place with the battle (or death), and requires a certain spatial disposition of the protagonists, (Arjuna in the middle of the battlefield, Hegel aside and above it, Napoleon on a white stallion, Arjuna on a chariot driven by Krishna, etc.). What we know in the latter case I would call, for want of a better term, *pure content*, and it is pure content through which it would be possible to come to an understanding of myth and to which a myth can be reduced. It is through the event of knowledge that thought is directed to the known, not the other way round, in myths at any rate. And, as in the case of self-crucifying Odinn, it is the act of obtaining the knowledge, or the 'act of knowledge' that 'generates' the content of this knowledge, and not the other way round.

Pure content emerges, in the act of interpretation of content (i.e., of text *as* content), as *the primary interpretable*. 'Primary' neither in the sense of 'being before' other elements of the same content or the contents of the texts historically or quasi-historically preceding it, nor in the sense of 'being before' other acts or moments of interpretation of the same content, for the very term 'content' implies an act of interpretation that has already taken place (as well as the term 'text' for that matter)—but 'primary' in the sense that an interpretation establishes in a content, in that which has already 'become' a content in interpretation, some *factual invariables* which, in their combination and intertanglement, constitute the pure content. That is, in our first plot these invariables are god Krishna as charioteer, Krishna and Arjuna in the middle of the battlefield, Arjuna's hesitation, etc. It could be said of the pure content

emerging in the act or acts of its interpretation that it draws the latter to itself, suggesting, thereby, the idea of the consciousness representing itself as another. On the other hand, however, if we observe the pure content, as already formed by and presented to interpreting consciousness, it could also be suggested that it is due to the intentionality of the text itself that the various factual invariables attract and are drawn to each other, forming in their sum total the complex pure content. And, finally, if looked at from a 'third' point of view, the first two being those of the interpretation and the interpreted, pure content can be seen as that which is, as it were, always known as the *object* of interpretation. And when one interprets the pure content as an object one does it in the infinite number of ways. When I say, in the context of a phenomenological approach to myth, that, in distinction from, say, language, text does not yield to interpretation and that resistance to interpretation is in the nature of text, all I mean is that as pure content it is *one with* interpretation, and that the 'objectivity' of pure content can be *another* as many times and in as many ways as there were, are, and will be acts of interpretation.

Now, let us return to our three plots. What we see in them, by way of interpretation is: (A) *an event of knowledge*, i.e., the obtaining by a protagonist of a knowledge that is higher, or other than his previous knowledge (which implies, as has already been said, a difference in knowledge or different knowledges)—in all the three plots; (B) *a knowledge of event*, i.e., knowing the same event as different from or other than it was known previously by a protagonist or currently by other people—in the first and the second episode; (C) *a knowledge of an event of knowledge*, which presupposes the existence of certain concrete things, circumstances, and features in things and circumstances that lead to their interpretation as *absolute objects*, i.e., objects in the sense of which something else is interpreted while they themselves are not to be subject to *further* interpretation and remain as they are—in all the three plots (Krishna taking Arjuna to the middle of the battlefield, Odinn hanging headlong from the ash tree, and Hegel seeing Napoleon enter Jena on his white horse).

It is to be noted that that which can be seen as the *content* (and, respectively, 'text') of knowledge itself, is left, as it were, beyond the pale of our triple classification as a kind of 'variable' that may, as in the first and second plots, or may not, as in the third, be directly known as something 'given', if, of course, it does not simply coincide with the content of the knowledge (B). But it is, in the first place, (C), where we deal with what we have already styled as pure content, and wherefrom

the *idea* of the mythical assumes its contours, whereas the *content of knowledge* may or may not lead us to interpret it mythologically, and if so, it would be, necessarily, an indirect, secondary, and very complex interpretation. And this is so, because, speaking in terms of a phenomenological approach employed here, *the content of knowledge is always secondary to and derivative from, the event of knowledge*. It is at this point, i.e., at the point where the event of knowledge coincides with the knowledge of the event and the knowledge of the event of knowledge, that the content of knowledge can become known as mythological in its philosophical postulations, although, of course, if abstracted from the situation of its being achieved—i.e., the events (A), (B), and (C) here—this content with its postulations would be seen by an historian of philosophy as a ‘pure’ philosophy. And it is some ‘purely’ philosophical ideas related to our three plots that I shall try to investigate *mythologically* in the following section.

5

PHILOSOPHY IN MYTH; ARJUNA, KRISHNA
AND ODINN. IS PHILOSOPHIZING NOTHING
MORE THAN BREAKING THE ROOF OF ONE
MYTH TO FIND ONESELF IN THE BASEMENT
OF ANOTHER? AND WHAT ABOUT TIME?

So, in the middle of the battlefield, Arjuna, the warrior, tells Krishna, the charioteer, that he does not want to kill his enemies in the impending battle, to which Krishna replies that he cannot kill or be killed for he is Self (*ātman*) that cannot kill or be killed. To this episode we will return in Lecture Four in some detail. Now it suffices to say that, in addressing Arjuna, Krishna postulated Self (*ātman*). He did so as if this had not been known to Arjuna *before*, for each and every act (event) of communication of knowledge is always *new* and, as it were, *the first*.

This is a moment very important phenomenologically, for it implies not only the formal (ritualistic) character of instruction in higher or highest knowledge,⁷ but also that such a knowledge is presented, in our interpretation, as the content to which its instruction or communication is related as a special event [(C) in the end of [section 4](#) here]. Then, this content cannot, as such, be presented as an event. More than that, it is related to the event of knowledge as a kind of ‘anti-event’. For, let me

⁷ *The Bhagavadgita*, II, 5–10, p. 74–5.

emphasize, nothing happens in or with *ātman*, nor with ‘thee’ as *ātman*. And this is so not only because the latter is a-temporal, but also because ‘as’ here does not imply any interval in time or space, being itself an a-temporal modus of the content of knowledge (about this further, in Lecture Two). [Then this content in the context of (C) would figure as a specific content opposed to pure content.] So, let me repeat it now, but this time from the point of view of this content only, i.e., of ‘philosophy’, so to speak: *ātman*, *Self*, is not event, for it is not related to any other event in time and space, or shall we say, in the *Bhagavadgita* at the very least, it has *no position* and figures as mere *being and knowing*. That is, as such, it is not related to anything or anybody, which is not to say that nothing and nobody is related to it. On the contrary, it is through Krishna’s Divine Knowledge communicated by Him to Arjuna, that Arjuna becomes related to Self by virtue of *his* knowledge of Self. But what, then, is Arjuna, in this relation, and what is this relation itself? Arjuna, in this relation, is that which knows, may know, or can know of (‘his’) Self, that is, know that there is Self. [He cannot know Self, for it is Self that knows him, for it is not related to him.] This, however, is only one face of him, that facing *ātman* or himself as *ātman*. His other face is facing himself as a sentient being (*bhūta*, *sattva*) of one kind or other. [In both cases he is ‘I’—‘I’ as that which thinks of itself (or knows itself) as thinking on (or knowing) something that is not ‘I’].⁸

So, returning to what we have called ‘event’, we find in Arjuna (i.e., that which is called and addressed as ‘Arjuna’) an ‘instructee’, so to speak, in the knowledge of what he is and of what his ‘instructor’, Krishna the Lord, is, that is, in the knowledge of Self, *ātman*. It is that *ātman* that, when embodied (‘possessor of a body’, *dehin*), changes its bodies as a man (*nara*) changes his clothes.⁹ However, what happens (i.e., an event) does happen not to or with *ātman*, nor to ‘beings’ in general (always referred to in the third person), but only to named ‘me’ or ‘thee’ who is an actual or potential recipient of the ‘higher’ knowledge of *ātman*, on the one hand, and an actual possessor of the ‘lower’ knowledge of beings, their bodies, and the world, on the other

⁸ This is a purely phenomenological remark that presupposes one’s *knowledge* of oneself as another. Thinking’ here is a mere linguistical convention without any especial philosophical meaning, that is, thinking on that which is already known from something or somebody else.

⁹ The *Bhagavadgita*, II, 22, p. 75–76. Man here is a variety of sentient beings and stands for *sattva* or *bhūta*.

(with two respective 'organs' of knowledge, *buddhi* and *manas*). In other words, whatever happens, or of whatever event we can speak, write, or think, happens in the space between 'I' and its *knowledge* of Self and 'I' in its relation to the world of beings, including that very 'I' as a being and body. It is for such an 'I' that the term *puruṣa* was used in the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Upanishads*. But what about *time*?

This question cannot be asked without asking and answering the question, the time of *what*? For, whatever is given to us is a fact of consciousness presented as text, content and plot. When we think, now, on myth and the mythological in the content of texts we are thinking of plots, and time here would be necessarily a time of a plot, or within a plot, or derived from plot, or related to it in whatever way. Or, perhaps, more precisely, time would figure here, as the time of *knowledge* of plot or a knowledge *in* plot. And it is in this connection that we have to take a step back in our considerations and revert to an element or event in plot without considering which no phenomenological understanding of time would be possible—the event of death or end of one's consciousness of oneself and of one's plot. The idea of time, then, can be reduced to the idea of death (or end) understood in two different aspects of the latter, the negative and the positive, to wit: time as reduced to the impossibility of one's knowledge of (one's own) death, and time as reduced to a possibility of knowledge of death from the point of view and in terms of that which is, itself, deathless, as, for instance, is Self, *ātman*. It is from this point of view only, that time can be introduced into a plot as (the knowledge of) that which 'there is' in the plot not only after the death of the protagonist but also after this (and any other) plot's end.

Now we have to digress from what could be called a philosophy in, or in relation to, the content of Krishna's knowledge, to that what borders on the *pure content* of the mythological. There are three different times in the *Bhagavadgita*. The first is the 'quasi-historical' time of Krishna's descents (*avatāra*), or rather, time established by Him in his descents as a sequence of cycles (*yugas*, etc.). [This is not *His* time, for He as the Self of all Selves (*paramātmā*), is not *in* time, as is any Self anyway.] This time can be known by men (*nara*) and gods (*deva*) as the time of their lives, is commensurable with their existences and experiences (knowledges), and is *subjective* as far as it is experienced and known by them though, at the same time, *objective* since it was established by Krishna for them. In fact, what we would call 'history', is this time, for history is always the time of something else, of something objective and, therefore, different from and other

than time itself, be it Krishna's descents, self-cognition of the Absolute Idea, or evolution of the organic or inorganic material world. All these 'objectivities' cannot be experienced or made experientiable *as* time, and can be thought of *in* time only on the strength of *another knowledge* issuing from a knower who is placed, or places himself, beyond the *end* of 'his' plot, as Krishna, who, while being manifested, remains outside all his manifestations in time and space.

The time of the second kind in *the Bhagavadgita* is the time of knowledge, and not of that which is known as that knowledge's *content*. This is the time during which a higher knowledge (see above here) is communicated to one, in the first place, and is perceived by one, in the second. This is not 'theoretically' postulated in *the Bhagavadgita*, simply needs not to be so, for this time is throughout the whole text extraneous to knowledge itself, as the 'organ' of such a perception, mind (*manas*), is extraneous to the Self of the perceiver. It is *natural*, for mind can be objectified (i.e., thought to be an object) as an aspect of nature. It is also *empirical* in the sense that mind knows itself as working in the regime of this kind of time and imposes this regime on other minds when it thinks on them. At the same time, it is presented by mind to itself as the *idea* of its own 'inner' *duration* (i.e., the duration of its own *process*), on the one hand, and its own fixation as one indivisible and separate *event* (as an *event of knowledge* in the previous section), on the other. This kind of time is very 'flexible' and exists only in relation to the knowledge it perceives and to one's (mental) capacity to perceive this knowledge. And indeed, when we learn from the text (and not from its content) that the whole conversation of Krishna with Arjuna lasted a couple of seconds, while the 'actual' time of its reading aloud would have amounted to no less than two hours and a half, we have to account for it by the supernatural character of the message first, the transcendental character of the knowledge, second, and the supernatural character of the perception, third.¹⁰ In the sense of this idea time seems to be an epiphenomenon of knowledge seen in its aspect of 'non-content'. Being secondary to the external aspect of knowledge and the mere functioning of mind, this kind of time starts, continues, and ends with the start, continuation, and end of a described (in one way or

¹⁰ In fact, here, as in very many other ancient and early-medieval Indian contexts, knowledge, its communication and its perception are *one event*, and more importantly, *one phenomenon*. In this connection, it would be interesting to note that the 'date' of this event, as referred to above (in [section 2](#)), is entirely *external* to this event, as well as to the content of *the Bhagavadgita*.

another, for how else could we or anybody else have known of it?) act, or event, of mind. From the point of view of a higher (let alone the highest) knowledge of Krishna it is nothing but a mere figment of human or divine imagination (corresponding to, respectively, the natural or supernatural mind), a *māyā* of a *māyā*. It is born and dies with an act of thought, not even with the thinker, let alone the Divine One.

With the third kind of time, postulated in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*, we are returning to the philosophical content of the text. However, this derivative and secondary character of time as that which exists only in the presence of its 'organ', i.e., mind, entails one very important, though itself derivative and secondary, idea, to wit: that mind may think of itself not only as thinking and, therewith, 'organically', naturally thinking *in* time (i.e., in the time of its thinking), but also as non-thinking, or even more than that, as *absent*. From this idea of absence of mind it may, in its turn, follow that there could exist a special *time of the absence of mind* which, though undoubtedly also mental, is, as it were, 'empty', that is, *empty of mental events as its content*. This kind of time would be homogeneous by definition and devoid of any discreteness for there can be no discrete acts of thought there, nor intervals between them. The idea of that empty, homogeneous, and non-discrete time, though quasi-psychological in its nature, finds its extrapolation in historical perspective and retrospective, merging with the first kind of time here, when one's thinking and knowledge are projected into the past and future of Krishna's manifestations; stopping (or 'death') of thinking would figure as the end (also 'death') of a period, and the intervals between the collapse (*pralaya*) of one world and its resurgence as another. Death and end here are the final points of reduction of this idea. Moreover, in the ancient and early medieval Indian *yogic* contexts empty time figures as resulting from certain very advanced *yogic* practices, in which mind contemplates itself as objectless and stopped. In other words, from the self-experiencing mind where it belongs, the idea of empty time returns to one's life, and then to the cycle of the world (a 'history') forming, thereby, the respective 'spaces' of plots; in the first case the plot of the thinking human or superhuman (animal, divine, etc.) protagonist, and in the second the plot of the protagonist who manifests (but *is not*) the Transcendental Absolute, as Krishna the charioteer manifests Krishna the Absolute who, Himself, does not think in this time (just as one's Self does not think *in* this time either). This time cannot be postulated ontologically not only for the reason that it is subjective, i.e., dependent on an *individual* mind, but in the first place because it is confined, strictly phenomenologically

speaking, to an individual state of consciousness, so that even within one plot there can be more than one time of this kind. Thus, in the last case empty time would figure as no more than a parameter of narration, which is also mental, being assigned by one mind to another.¹¹ The narrator knows the plot because (or, ‘which means that’) he knows the death of its protagonist, though only as an *event* and, ‘mythologically’, his is a ‘different’ time; different too is the time of Krishna the charioteer who knows the death and deathlessness of Arjuna, and of his friends and enemies, as well, of course, as his own ‘death’ as a manifestation of Krishna the Absolute, etc. Empty time can be thought of as a ‘reflex’ or ‘reflexive abstraction’ from our mental time, spontaneously (naturally, again) arising together with the thought of its absence. But let me stress again that the idea of mental time with empty time as its by-product is present in the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* as mere illusion: temporal is illusory here, and it is one’s mental energy that, itself a trick, tricks one with that time.¹²

¹¹ We see in the *Puranas* that one Brahma’s day is equal to 364,000 days of Indra, that one Indra’s day is equal to 364,000 days of men, etc., while in the Buddhist sources we see that the time of one’s death (more precisely, dying) is different from the time of one’s life, and that the time of one’s existence between death and new birth is *indefinite* from the point of view of one’s life, etc. All these differences are accounted for by the differences in one’s mind or, more exactly, states of mind. About this further in Lecture Five.

¹² The idea of empty and homogeneous time as a corollary from the idea of mental time is unavoidable *psychologically*, and not only historically, though, of course, in *our* time it cannot help being applied to history as if it belongs there, not to thinking of history. This produces a strange effect of almost mythological ambiguity of empty time in the writings of modern philosophers. Walter Benjamin writes: “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous empty time.” And further: “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the *now* (*Jetztzeit*).” [Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hanna Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, London, Jonathan Cape, 1970 (1955), p. 263.] What we have here is, in fact, a thinking on history, that empties its subject of its heterogeneous content, and thinks of itself as contentless and empty. This point of view, which returns us to the idea of time as the lack of one’s knowledge of one’s death, is in keeping with the Bergsonian idea of time as duration (*durée*) from which death is eliminated. However, of course, neither Benjamin nor his elder contemporary Bergson would ever have agreed with the idea that time, in this sense, is ‘thought only’, and that their position in respect of time was as mythological as that of ‘Krishna as Time as Death’, or as my own position, for that matter.

With the third kind of time, as with the second, we find ourselves in the realm of content and knowledge, but in an altogether different sense. And it cannot be said of this time that it is the *time of* continuation of something, be it the descents of Krishna, the activity of mind, or the tricks of historical or biographical imagination, a psychical substitute of the ignorance of death. This kind of time, as postulated in the *Bhagavadgita*, is not a cosmic trick, nor even the Cosmic Trickster; what we are dealing with in it is *Krishna (Vishnu) Himself as Time as Death*. The super-cosmic monster into whose gigantic gullet are sucked all *persons* existing from (or more exactly, before) the beginning of time (of both the first and the second kinds), and “the nearer they are to that monster’s flaming mouth the more rapidly are they drawn in”.¹³ What persons? In general, *all* persons; in this particular case—almost all protagonists of the *Bhagavadgita*. All the extant persons in all the extant universes had been *designed and named* before the beginning of time (i.e., in the sense of the first and the second kinds) and space, then thrown into times and spaces of the universes, through which they will be racing until swallowed by Time as Death, wherefrom they will re-emerge, re-forged and remoulded, to be thereafter, re-designed and re-named as other, different persons. Such is the scheme, and the picture. But what *are* the persons?

It is enough, to anticipate a more detailed discussion on the subject in Lecture Five, to say here that, unlike Self (*ātman*) which is timeless, and a sentient being (*sattva*) whose time is mental or quasi-historical, a person (*puruṣa*) is assigned *objectively*, i.e., not by himself and his mind, to a span of time that stretches from ‘before the beginning’ to his end. But a person does not know his own ‘race-track’ in time and space, only Krishna as the Ancient Person (*puruṣaḥ purāṇaḥ*) knows it, for He exceeds in His Being all spaces and times, His own included. Or, to put it in other words, Krishna as the Highest Person (*puruṣottama*), is the ‘author’ of all the plots, though whenever He wishes to set foot on the scene in any play where He is always the director, He will become its protagonist and actor. This mythological scheme I am inclined to view as having important epistemological consequences in terms of plots and persons,

¹³ *The Bhagavadgita*, 11, 25–32, p. 115–7.

for it establishes knowledge of plot as that to which the idea of 'person-ness' is reduced. For, indeed, a Self has no plot, but knows its *field* in relation to the sentient beings through which it passes.¹⁴ A sentient being has no knowledge of itself, for it has no plot to know. A person is that which has a plot, and although he does not know it actually, i.e., while it continues unbeknownst to him, he possesses this knowledge potentially. This knowledge can be actualized (and *within* his plot too, as one of its *final* events), made known to him by *another*, God, Great Sage, Oracle, etc. At the same time, a person is that who can, if he knows, communicate this knowledge to others, while a Self would not and a sentient being cannot do that. Speaking phenomenologically, there can be no 'organ of person-ness', for though potentially conscious of himself and his plot, all that a person can be conscious of (his 'being conscious of' included) is determined in his inception and death *objectively*—by the primary design and final remelting produced by God.¹⁵

This threefold scheme of time in the *Bhagavadgita*—quasi-historical time or the time of Krishna's manifestations, mental time, and Time as Death—is, I think, the fullest one can look for in mythology. If we apply it to our brief plot of Odinn's self-crucifixion on the World Ash Tree, we will find it very curtailed there. The first kind of time is implied in this episode which, itself, can be regarded as a landmark in the history of the universe with *that* Odinn and, probably, a prelude to the end of this universe and the death of Odinn. Odinn's mental time can only be deduced though, as has already been noted, Odinn's nine days and nights of hanging were not the time of the process of knowledge or even of its communication to Odinn, but the time of its acquirement, so to speak, in fact extraneous to knowledge itself and being, rather, the time of ritual of initiation *into* the impending knowledge. As for the third kind of time, it seems to be entirely absent in the Elder Edda, for there is no indication in the text of the existence of an objective absolute or God who is behind the periodic dissolutions of Odinn's universes and is aware of them as *Its* or *His* own manifestations or creations. In other words, there is no postulation, let alone self-

¹⁴ Whether or not a Self knows a person remains open and, I think, has to remain open for reasons purely mythological, to wit, this knowledge of Self is not described in Indian myths.

¹⁵ Person is a unit of consciousness not only in the sense of 'one consciousness' or 'one's consciousness' but also as the consciousness of (one's) time.

postulation, in the Edda of that which knows all the plots, its own plot included, nor is there a Meta Universe including all other universes with their cycles. It is our Hegelian plot that provides a striking parallel to what we might call a consciousness of time in the *Bhagavadgita*.

6

HEGEL'S MYTH OF TIME (A COMMENTARY ON A COMMENTARY)

First one brief reminder. When I spoke here about the not yet defined mythological as that which exists only as the content (plot, etc.) of a text *together with* its actual and possible interpretations, the emphasis was on the content. Now I would like to stress the mythological as appearing in the very direction of interpretation, in the intentionality of a thinking that interprets another thinking (or itself *as* another thinking). For this purpose I choose a very concrete textual form (or genre) of interpretation—commentary. The choice comes out of my interest in Indian philosophy, of which commentary is not only the most important textual form but the main modus of existence: one philosopher comments upon another, another upon the third, and so on. Time here is the time of thinking on a text, then the time of thinking on thinking on a text, that is, the time of commentary. And my point of observation, then, can be imagined as situated in the space of texts, commenting and commented upon. From this point of view Alexandre Kojève commenting on Hegel in his *Introduction* is the same as Ramanuja or Shankara commenting on the *Bhagavadgita*.¹⁶ Now it is I who comments upon Kojève. Any time other than that of commentation does not matter (or, shall we say, is temporarily suspended), the only thing that matters is the point at the intersection of three texts: a passage from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, a passage from Kojève's *Introduction*, and my own commentary on the plot of the 'Hegelian Situation' with its moments of pure content, i.e., Hegel's seeing Napoleon in Jena, the Jena battle, etc. And it is these moments of pure content that are a necessary point of departure here in our attempts to understand Hegel's *myth of time*, for that is to what his idea of the Absolute Spirit can be,

¹⁶ Having said that, we, of course, ought not to forget that the last two were totally alien to the idea of the 'biographical' and, therewith, one's life with its time.

again mythologically, reduced by an external observer.¹⁷

A myth of time? But, again, of *what* time? In the case of our Hegelian plot it is, of course, the time of the *event* of knowledge, not of knowledge itself, included into our first or quasi-historical time as it figures in the *Bhagavadgita*, and no less ‘quasi’ than in the Indian epic.

First, a purely historico-philosophical remark. Unlike Kant, Spinoza and Descartes before him, and like Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger after him, Hegel was an anthropological philosopher. That is, his was a philosophy the centre and focus of which, the Absolute Spirit, was not only the Truth (Object), but also the Subject, and not only the Consciousness (Mind), but also the Man conscious of his own death on the one hand, and of the end of his history, on the other.¹⁸ That is to say that to Hegel, the individuality of men is reduced to mortality and their historicity is reduced to the end of history.¹⁹ Moreover, by way of reverse symmetry, the death of the individual is the end of his death-consciousness, while the realization of the Absolute in Man is the end of human history or the *end of times*, so to speak—for there will be nothing to be done in terms of human relations, and history returns to its beginning. This conceptual scheme raises the question: is there time of consciousness here as that which is separate from consciousness conscious of it and from the conscious ‘I’?—The answer is, no, there is not. Time is not mental in the sense of the second kind of time in the *Bhagavadgita*, it is Mind that is temporal nor can there be a possibility of empty time, because one dies with one’s consciousness and one’s time (Hegel is a sheer atheist here). But what about realization of the Absolute Spirit at the end of human history, which, in our little Hegelian plot, took place 187 years ago—what kind of time do we deal with in that case? Is it the first kind of time, or the quasi-historical time in the *Bhagavadgita*?

¹⁷ In saying this I am aware that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not allow for such a position, in the first place, and that the idea of an external observer of myth is, itself, no less mythological than the myth he observes.

¹⁸ ‘History is transcendence... It is the “dialectical suppression” of Man who negates himself (as “the given”, “natural”) at the same time preserving himself (as *human* being) and thus sublimates himself by his conserving self-negation. And this “dialectical movement” implies and presupposes the finitude of that which “moves”, i.e., the death of men who create the History’, *Introduction*, p. 559.

¹⁹ *Id.*, p. 552

To answer this question we have to leave the ground of the content of knowledge and return to its event and, therewith, to the pure content or, in other words, from philosophy to mythology. For, indeed, from the *knowledge that history has ended its course* it follows—and Hegel asserts it in his *Phenomenology*—that history in its fullness can be spoken of only in so far as it is *realized* or, shall we say, the fact of its realization, which finished with it, at the same time generated the very phenomenon of its existence prior to its realization in and by Hegel. Historical time, then, will be seen on the one hand as the time from man's separation from nature till the moment of self-realization of the Absolute, and on the other as the time of retrospective, by a hindsight, re-construction of history—the last exists, therefore, always as re-constructed and never as even constructed, let alone 'been'. Furthermore, this duality of 'quasi-historical' time corresponds to, or even is one with, the 'dialectical' character of Hegelian determinism. [The adjective 'dialectical' is almost tantamount to 'mythological' here.] For, though from one side the Absolute, both as the Truth (Object) and the Man (Subject), *objectively* determines its own history as the history of its self-realization in *men*, from another side it is men's thinking where this determinism acquires its phenomenology and anthropology.²⁰ That is, though, as it is postulated in Hegel, the Truth (objective Absolute) determines its Knower (Subject-man), the latter determines the process of that Truth's self-realization, i.e., his own history together with its 'vanishing', 'coming to an end'.²¹ In fact, these

²⁰ The Hegelian *Geist* cannot be postulated without a separate postulation of its Knower—they simply cannot exist, in contemplation, without one another. From this follows the necessity of an anthropology: the Absolute needs to be *He*, while in the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Upanishads* it is *that*. Nor can the Absolute be postulated without being, itself, 'the knowable', whereas in the *Bhagavadgita* it is un-knowable. And that the Knower is Man is absolutely necessary in Hegel and would be accidental in the *Bhagavadgita*.

²¹ However, this subjectivity has quite another edge to it. For to Hegel as well as to Kojève everything they deal with would, in one way or another, be *that which actually happened, has happened, and is still happening*. Which is to say, is *history*, 'one without another'. Which means, the beginning, at the 'first act' of man's self-consciousness and its recognition by another man, the continuation, with its mortal struggle for recognition, and the end, with the Spirit's *self-realisation* in the last philosopher and the first Knower, Hegel, and the Universal Recognition actualized in Napoleon. 'One without another', because Hegel is *one point* at which the end of history happened, and Kojève is its sole witness for the coming post-historical age.

two determinisms are different in time and in direction of determining, so to speak. In the act (event) of Hegel's Absolute realization, the observer of myth can see three different times. There is the time of realization itself, i.e., its duration, in the sense of the second, or mental, time in the *Bhagavadgita*. There is the time of history, which is realized by Hegel as an objective process directed in time from its beginning, through its continuation and up to its termination in that very act of realization. And there is the time *between* the act of realization of that history and that history itself. The last time in its direction is opposite to the 'historical', and it has no duration. This is a momentary or 'zero' time, akin to the mythological time of 'timeless' manifestations (*māyā*, *vibhūti*) of Vishnu and Shiva. Moreover, this self-realization of the Absolute as Man's history can be seen as determining history as the *pure content*, i.e., the 'mythological' in our Hegelian plot (see section above) can be seen as determining the *content of knowledge*: the myth *contains* in itself the history it terminates, and the 'anthropic' contains the Spirit, not the other way about.

Now, let us consider some mythological consequences of the Hegelian *event* of realization for *thinking* (*Denken*) involved in that event. In terms of Hegel's absolute *anthropic* determinism—anthropic here means by Man, for Man, in Man, and this is the only *absolute* determinism I can think of now—our habitual philosophical questions become entirely superfluous because of the apparently tautological character of the answers and the circularity of the process of thinking involved in the latter. In a nutshell, the Hegelian stand on thinking in its relation to its object can be formulated in the following way: If I think (γ) that my thinking (β) on (α) is being determined by that (α), then I have to think (δ) that not only (β), but (γ), (δ), and any further fact of my reflexive thinking will be determined by (α). Reflexive here is such a thinking that is related to its object not immediately but through another thinking having the same object as its content. [As in our case the content would be (α) in relation to (β), (β) in relation to (γ), and (γ) in relation to (δ).]

This formulation has three implications. The first is that to (α) an *ontological* status is ascribed. That is, (α) is opposed to (β), (γ), etc. as 'being' to 'thinking'. The second is that at the same time this opposition is cancelled and the ontological status of (α) challenged, by the implication that (α) should remain indeter-mined and indeterminable as to whether (or when) it is being thought of. (α) might be thought of, by an *external* observer of Hegelian philosophy and situation, as *uncertain* in regard to its 'being-ness' or 'thought-ness' (though Hegelian *Geist*

cannot not be thought of by definition). The third implication is concerned with time. Time here is *when one thinks*, that is, the time of the *occasion* or *event* of (γ), or, as already noted above, the time *between* the fact of (γ) and the 'fact' of (α). In the sense of this 'time' we could reformulate our formulation as follows: whenever I think that (γ) is being determined by (α) it may imply that only where there is (γ) there is (α) determining (γ). It might be supposed, Buddhistically speaking, that (γ) and (α) are (or, in the Abhidhamma, *arise*) always together with one another.

This third implication of the Hegelian scheme of absolute determinism entails a possibility of reversal in the direction of what determines what; in principle, at least, it would be possible, then, that (γ) should determine (α), though mythologically both versions would remain equivalent. The reversed version of the myth of absolute determinism based on Hegel's anthropic principle would also presuppose a certain 'ontologicity' ascribed to (γ), instead of (α) as in our direct version. Only in this case it would be (α) that becomes variable, and (γ), (β), etc., which would figure as constants. In both versions, however, it would be unavoidable to admit the postulation in (γ) of something whose nature is outside a 'logical realm' covered by the opposition 'thinking/being' (or 'ontology/epistemology' for that matter). So, in the direct version it would be: 'the thought (γ) that (α) determines (β) is determined by (α), but where the second (α)—shall we denote it (A)?,—is not opposed to (γ) and remains indeterminable in relation to (α) and (γ)'. Then, in the reversed version it would read: 'the thought (γ) that (α) is determined by (γ) determines (α), where (γ) denoted as (Γ) would be indeterminable in relation to (γ)/(α)'.

Such is Hegel's mythological scheme of time as, by definition, the *inner* time (i.e., pertaining to the *content* of his text) of his myth of the Absolute and the 'inner inner' time of its realization in history. Time in Hegel serves as a tautology of the 'conscious I', that is, I's retrojection to its beginning and source, where there is no time, from its 'present' position, after which there will be no time, that is, there will be no history, that is, no struggle of Man for recognition; that is, no philosophy, only pure, static knowledge of the Knower, the Sage, the Absolute and absolutely self-satisfied Scientist. Such is, in its essence, Kojève's commentary on *The Phenomenology*, though, of course, he would never have dared to call Hegel's, let alone his own, scheme of time mythological and would definitely have dissociated himself from any re-formulation of that scheme. But mythological it remains due to the pure content of the Hegelian plot without which Kojève's

commentary would never have appeared. Kojève's was the last attempt to explain the Hegelian myth in its own language, that is, in a manner that would, in principle at least, be comprehensible to the creator of the *Phenomenology*. In other words, he was the last who re-produced a myth tautological with Hegelian ontological mythology.

Now, for the last time, I make an observation about time in Hegel and Kojève. The time of thinking (or knowledge), the time of the object of thinking (e.g. history) and the time of their relation (causal or otherwise)—such is the Hegelian triad of time, as seen from the point of view of the mythologist, not of the historian of philosophy. Unlike a cyclic and entirely 'apparitional' idea of time in the *Bhagavadgita*, and quite 'non-apparitional' but also cyclic in the Elder Edda, it is based on the postulate of absolute *one-ness*: one Spirit, one Object, one Man (or mankind), one History, one (last!) Philosopher (i.e., Hegel himself), one (first!) Sage or Scientist (Hegel again), one Time, one Post-History (our time now), etc. This type of philosophical monism combined with the one-ness of the mythological picture of the universe and strongly tinted with deism (albeit in the form of atheism) is a very persistent mythological tendency in our own historical consciousness, a tendency still far from exhausted. Each time that one thinks that one's period of time is at its close, one's perception (or more precisely, apperception) would be to regard the end of this period as the end of time, and to regard oneself as situated on the border between time and, as it were, post-temporal, non-historical existence. Thus oriented, a 'thinking I' situates itself on the brink of temporality in respect of time which it regards as a (or, practically, *the*) condition of its thinking on itself and the world. This is doubly subjective, for one 'thinking I' singles out time from its own thinking first, and objectivates it as the time of its historical existence, second.²² In doing this it finds for its subjective self-awareness a language by no means less subjective and applies it to the things and events external to itself producing, therewith, a merely

²² It would be, indeed, enough to look at such modern clichés as 'the last war', 'the end of culture', 'the end of human civilization', or at such self-designating notions as 'post-modernism', 'post-structuralism', 'post-Marxism', 'deconstructionism', 'post-Oedipal', etc., to understand all of them as no more than terms of one's situating oneself *subjectively* on the brink of one or another 'self-situation' context, without realizing the *objective* mythological character of this 'self-situating'.

mythological picture of the homogeneity of time.²³

Myth, as I treat it here and now, is a *phenomenon of consciousness*. It is, thus, not only a phenomenon in a general and trivial sense, that is, that which, when we think of it, has already passed through our consciousness ('our' is a manner of speaking here), but a phenomenon in a more specifically phenomenological sense, to wit: not only are we conscious of something as a myth, but we are also conscious of a myth as something, as some *other* consciousness. And 'other' it is in two quite different senses: 'other' in a relative sense, i.e., 'other than I or mine', 'other than this', etc.; and 'other' as a *conscious object* possessing certain specific conscious characteristics which have made it the object of my mythological deliberations.

I was born into a civilization full of things *called* 'myths', the Myth of Creation, the Myth of Resurrection, the Myth of Oedipus, etc., calling into the order of the day their recreation as general (scientific, philosophical, etc.) propositions concerning their 'mythologicity', so to speak. In those propositions myth figures as the predicate and a term of description for a plot, situation, event, or even a person, such as, 'the creation of the world by God is a myth', 'the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth', 'the story of Oedipus is a myth', etc. Myth to me was a part and parcel of my cultural background, an element of my *historical* heritage, and a word in current cultural use to denote what was, at *that* time, conceived as 'mythological'. It was much later that I began to realize that myth, both as an idea with its use and application, and as the objects to which this idea is applied, has been stolidly unreflected upon as a structure of consciousness, my own as well as another's, which it has remained in the branch of scholarship called 'mythology' as well as in everyday life.

And the last remark. In this introductory attempt, so to speak, I dealt with time, as it may seem, disproportionally to other aspects of myth. This is dictated by the fact that in an as yet not defined mythology I see the workings of the structures of consciousness (those of the mythologist's included) whose own temporal character is beyond any doubt. It is for the same reason that in comparing our three plots I consciously ignored their concrete historical contextualization involving, among other things, their belonging to three entirely different and decidedly unconnected traditions. Of this I am clearly aware. They

²³ This, of course, is not to say that a picture of the universe with heterogeneous time would be any less mythological.

are to me three fragments deliberately extracted from their respective traditions and presented, as it were, as ‘dead ends’ of their respective mythologies. In my, also utterly fragmentary, re-presentation they continue to live, however non-naturally, as examples, specimens of thinking that, in its own nature, is not confined to any definite time or space.²⁴

²⁴ This singling out and fragmenting is not a method adopted by a mythologist but, rather, a spontaneous trend to which a philosopher gives free rein when he indulges in mythology. He sets himself the task of *de-naturizing* the content (plot) of a text by extracting from that content that which ‘had not been handed down by tradition’ [W. Benjamin, 1970 (1955), pp. 40–41, 44–49]. Then the very fact of his doing so will be on the one hand an actualisation of that content in his consciousness, making it *present* and *a-temporal*, and on the other it will enable him to return with that content back to its tradition and consider the latter from the point of view of its own timeless elements.

LECTURE TWO

What is Myth?

(*A meeting with Indra*)

I do not want the truth,
I want the answer.

H.P. Lovecraft

1

MYTH AND THREE ASPECTS OF TEXT

To myth I have come as a philosopher who, by the definition given by Nietzsche in the end of the 19th century and Røge von Rims in the end of ours, cannot identify himself with his own theory, let alone that of someone else. On the contrary, he identifies his life with his reflexion on it (though not the other way round) and vies, desperately, with a scientist or scholar in himself for freedom from objective truth. He passes through the 'otherness' of the object of his thinking, because he has already objectified himself as the 'other' in his reflexion. So, to myth he comes as to an unknown thing, in principle at least, which may happen to be himself too.

§1

Text as the primary object of mythological investigation

Let us begin with 'myth' as a mere word, used and usable in the context of modern culture, as a word denoting a not yet defined notion and related to a vague and not yet specified idea. For, it is not even known *of what or of whom* the question 'what is myth' is being asked and where my questioning about myth is directed to. How, indeed, can we ask one indefinite thing about another? Therefore, merely to ask this question, let alone answer it, we have to establish the *primary object* of

our investigation, and the only thing that can serve this purpose is *text*, however general and all-encompassing an idea of text might be.¹ Thus a text of any kind, primary or derivative, original or imitative, genuine or plagiarised, personal or impersonal, primitive or complex, open or coded, ancient or modern, oral or written, heard or unheard, read or unread, perceived or non-perceived, remains the only possible primary object of investigation and the only source of 'raw' material for the mythologist.

§2

The 'thing-ness' of text

This is a characterisation, and not a definition, of text as one of our most basic cultural categories, which on the one hand presupposes an *idea* of text in general, and on the other, an idea of *a text* as a concrete thing. The 'thing-ness' of text involves not only its 'physicality' in terms of objective physical properties (such as visual form, space-configuration, colour, sound, etc.), but also its 'mental-ness' in terms of modes and characteristics of its perception.² Such is our situation with text as a thing, if it is seen from the perspective of culture which uses the word 'text' as a term of its description.

§3.

The first aspect (phenomenological): text as a fact of the objectification of consciousness

However, if observed from the perspective of consciousness and from the point of view of an observer who purports to observe through a text the consciousness of those to whom this text can be attributed in one

¹ As the object of mythological investigation, text would lend itself, as it were, in opposition to myth as the *subject* of mythological investigation. So, reiterating the previous stance, the subject is what we are asking about of an object, and the object is what we are asking of about a subject.

² Text here is not a linguistical category or a classificatory unit or case of language, because it may include or consist of ideograms, pictograms, mantras, and other visual and audial signs or series of signs which neither belong to a concrete natural language nor derive from it. Though, of course, they might have become language if communicated, reported, described, or interpreted in a given language. Not being subordinated to one another, text and language overlap one another in most cases.

way or another, text would be thought of as a form *of consciousness*. Or to put it more precisely, the idea of text, in this case, would be reduced to that of *a way the consciousness, when it becomes 'conscious of...', objectifies itself in finite, discrete, and separate wholes called 'texts'*. It should be noted, in this connection, that text is not the sole way of self-objectification of consciousness. Nor could it be averred that text as a thing, not as an *idea of text*, is generated by consciousness. It would be better to say that where there is consciousness, there a text may happen to 'occur' or be present as a way or form of its objectification. A concrete text can be generated by nothing but another concrete text. So, strictly speaking, we cannot even say 'a text of consciousness' in any way other than metaphorical or as a manner of speaking, though we can say 'the text of a myth', for the latter implies the idea of *content*, whereas the former remains a merely *formal* condition for the existence (presence) of the latter. But about this later.³

§4

Phenomenological definition of text

This, in fact, is the first aspect of text as the primary object of mythological investigation, an aspect wherein a text is seen *as it is*, that is, as a thing or a 'quasi-material' entity which is supposed to remain the same both in its objective characteristics and in the subjective characteristics of its reception, perception and use. Or to explain this more concretely, *text, in the sense of its first and purely phenomenological aspect, is when thinking fixes apart or fraction of its continuum of discrete moments of thinking and posits it for itself (in the first place) as a whole which it can return to, remember, and reproduce on the one hand; and on the other as a complex whole, a series or configuration of elements, within which thinking can move as within a complex object.*

³ It should also be noted here that all tautological definitions related to text, such as 'culture is the sum total of texts', or 'the sum total of texts (or text in general) is all information available', seem to be irrelevant because of their stressedly *naturalistic* and non-phenomenological character.

§5

The fixity of text in space and outside time

I call text a fixed object because the *process* of thinking, with its *temporal* characteristics (such as its duration), stops here and gives way to the *space* of a text with its own *spatial* characteristics and dimensions. So, we have in text the space of objectified thinking, the space to which thinking can return again as to an already formed object and re-start its processuality in moving within this object as already deprived of its own temporality. So, text, in its phenomenological aspect, i.e., as an objectification of thinking or consciousness, can have no time of its own, only space, although its content may, and usually does, have the time or times of events described in it or the time of description itself. But this is a totally different matter which will be treated later.⁴

§6

Division and extension of texts

Text, in the sense of its phenomenological aspect, is an abstraction that allows one's thinking to operate with texts on any imaginable level of their division and segmentation and, thereby, to identify one text as many on the one hand, and on the other to identify two or more texts as *the same* text by calling them by the same *name* or *marking* them in any other way as *one* text.⁵ So, in the sense of the phenomenological aspect of text, an aspect which can be deciphered as 'nominal-intensive', the Veda (or the Vedas) would be the name of one text, the Rigveda of another, the Rigveda II, 8 of the third, this very sentence of mine of the fourth, etc. Likewise, the text of Rigveda edited by C.Geldner and the text of the English translation of Rigveda by R.Griffith might be named as the same text, etc.⁶ Each text, in this sense, can be seen as

⁴ Because, let me reiterate, objectification here is not a process but a *fact*, *fait accompli*, so to speak, all the time. And a fact that is related to thinking *not causally but by conditions of the being of them both*.

⁵ It is that *marking* of objectification of thinking that makes it the separate whole of a text for one's thinking itself, in the first place and allows it to be communicated in time and space to others, in the second.

⁶ In the same manner one may say, then, that two 'identical copies' of this translation are the same text, or two different texts, etc.

representing a different intentionality of thinking, though formally one and the same *direction* of thought which may be called 'textual'.

§7

The second aspect (communicational): text as an intention to be sent and received

Taken in its second aspect, which I would for convention's sake call *communicational*, text figures as a whole which is, or is to be, transmitted in time and space. The transmission of text seems to be quite a problem for phenomenology, for, in dealing with it you cannot separate the material (or quasi-material) means, methods, and conditions of the transmission of text from the intentionality of its fixation as an object of consciousness, the transmission of which can be seen as another side of its very being.⁷ At the same time an intention to transmit a text in a certain way, which may or may not be objectively (i.e., from the point of view of an external observer of texts) detected in or inferred from the text itself, and an intention of objectification of consciousness (or thought) as text could, in principle, be thought of as two different intentions (or thoughts). The idea of text, in the sense of this aspect, implies its actual or potential reception, or perception, or auto-perception, whereas in the sense of the first aspect it is irrelevant.

§8

Text as signal

Furthermore, this aspect presupposes, necessarily, the existence of a *spatio-temporal sphere*, varying in size from a single moment in time and a point in space to the 'whole time' of the universe and its whole space. Through this sphere the thought which objectifies itself in a text sends itself out forming, thereby, a configuration of 'thinking objects', for the very idea of transmission of texts is one with the idea of *other thoughts or conscious-nesses*, call it as you will, which may receive and perceive a text as an undividable individual signal not only from, but also *of* a thought other than themselves. Therefore, it might be suggested on these grounds, that an idea of 'otherness' of thought,

⁷ A semiotical aspect of this problem is discussed in the article: A.Piatigorsky, 'Some general observations on text as a type of signal', in *Structural and typological investigations*, ed. by V.V.Ivanov, Moscow, Nauka, 1961.

mind, or consciousness is inherent in this aspect of text. So, in the sense of the communicational aspect of text, which I call 'formal extensive', a text, in its reception and perception by 'others', can be reduced to its 'absolute minimum', i.e., to a signal signalling that it is a text and that it carries or may carry some content other than that 'it is a text', a content which, however, cannot be perceived by a receiver (i.e., a 'zero-content', so to speak).

§9

*The third aspect (content): text as it exists in its
perception and interpretation*

And finally, we are coming to the third and most essential aspect of text for mythology—*content*. Content, as a category related to text, cannot be defined logically or classificatorily. Very generally speaking, unlike the first aspect where text figures as a *fact* of objectification of consciousness and the second where it figures as an *intention* to be sent, received, and perceived, in the sense of the third aspect a text would figure as *that which exists only in its perception, reading and understanding by those who have already received it*. The last point is very important here, because the mere fact of text being as it is as well as the fact of its being sent and received as text have absolutely nothing to do with *what, how, and by whom* it is read, heard, understood, etc. In other words, the *content of a text, speaking phenomenologically, is that which is generated by, within, and as a result of, the process of its perception, reading, understanding and interpretation*.

§10

*Generative quality of text as existing between
consciousnesses*

I stress the 'process' here, for, being *temporal* (i.e., not momentary, having its own time), it reproduces the time *in* the text from that which hitherto has remained a mere *spatial* configuration of a fixed mental object. And this is not a 'mental' time of its reading, hearing, etc., but the text's own *inner* time, i.e., time of consciousness read by another consciousness, in a manner of speaking. That is where this aspect reveals another quality of text, namely, its *capacity to generate other texts*, and not by fragmentation, segmentation, combination, or identification of texts as separate wholes, but by using various elements of one text as bricks to build another, or by using the elements of one

text and the configurative or constructive principle of another text to build the third text, etc. Strictly speaking, if taken in the sense of its aspect of content, no text can be thought of as 'the first' or even 'the first in a series of texts', for the very idea of text presupposes that *there can never be one text without another*. Nor can we, in the sense of this generative aspect, assert that it is consciousness that generates text as content, because the former is always, as it were, 'already given' as the latter (and not the other way round).

However, before passing from 'text as content' as the object of mythological investigation, to 'myth as its subject', we have once more to return to our question about myth.

2

PLOT AS PROTAGONISTS, ACTIONS, AND SITUATIONS

§1

Three versions of the question 'what is myth?'

The question 'what is myth' remains a mere abstraction unless, as has been stated at the beginning of this lecture, I know *of what* or *of whom* I ask this question. The very nature of questioning here necessitates such a 'questioning the question' which, in the case of myth, can be reduced to three possible versions:

(A) The presupposition being, that what I am dealing with *is* a myth, in which case the question addressed to it would be '*what* are you'?⁸

(B) The presupposition being, that I am investigating an object (for instance, the content of a text) which may or may not reveal itself as a myth, in which case the question would be 'are *you* a myth?'

(C) The presupposition being, that 'myth' has already been used by me or by others as a term of description for some object or objects of investigation and in relation to some other terms used to describe the same objects. The question, then, would be addressed to myself and sound somewhat like 'what is the *meaning* of "myth" for me as its investigator?'

⁸ That is, 'what is to be a myth?'—in which case the difference between this question and 'what is myth?' will be that in the latter 'myth' figures as a term of objective knowledge, whereas the former implies a kind of self-knowledge.

§2

The investigator's knowledge included in the object of his investigation

A 'phenomenology of questioning' implies that in all three questions 'myth' has already been used as a word of ordinary language, which may designate certain (or even all?) facts and events that have come to my attention, and that in the third question it may be used also as a meta-term of the language of mythological description. It is the third question, however, in answering which we shall be confronted with some very serious methodological difficulties, because here the object of investigation—namely the contents of texts known to me—necessarily includes the text of *my own* knowledge of what a myth is or might be.

[For indeed, 'myth' as a term of description—that is, when used to describe something else, something 'other than', say, non-myth, is very difficult to explain in any way other than phenomenological. Phenomenological, in the most elementary sense that it presupposes a reduction of the notion of myth to some other notion or notions each of which can in its turn be regarded as a point of view, or a point of departure in a phenomenological investigation. As an object of reduction myth has its depths and shoals, its far-reaching prospects and dead ends. Of the last the deadliest is an almost total impossibility, in a mythological investigation, to distinguish between the objective and the subjective aspects of, as well as within, a myth, which, in its turn, makes it difficult to separate the emic and the etic approaches to it. For, indeed, where and how am I to draw the border-line between the mythological in an object, be it a text, a tale, a legend, etc., and the mythological in my own thinking when I investigate this object as a myth?]

§3.

Introduction of 'plot'

It is in connection with the third question concretising the question 'what is myth' that it can be suggested that we should address ourselves to one other notion which is a concretisation of the notion of content of text—the notion of *plot*. In the sense of plot all events, all that happens, happened, and will happen, thinking inclusive, can be rendered as *actions*, actions of any kind distributed in the time and space

of the content of text and organised in time-sequences and space-configurations.⁹ Plot is related to myth as an idea, notion, and word not only because Aristotle called both of them *muthos*, but, in the first place, because both are abstractions made from one's perception of the *content* of text. That is, abstractions which are possible only provided that consciousness has already become objectified in a text as a separate, discrete whole in the first place, and that the text in question has already been received in the second. These two would, then, be seen as preceding a text in its mental representation as a content, whether the last is represented as a synchronic eidetic image, or as a temporal sequence, or both. However, to imagine a plot (*muthos*) as a concretisation of content we have to transform such a representation into something far more abstract by asking the question, 'what is that about?', where 'that' would be this representation, and not the content of text it represents. Furthermore, 'that' here not only implies a distinction between perception of text as a physical (visible, audial, palpable, etc.) object and its perception as thinkable content, but also takes into account a distinction between 'what' and 'who' as well as between the 'perceived' and the 'perceiver' within that content. Then we may concretise our first, general question about plot as 'what has happened to what?', or 'what has happened to whom?', or, finally, 'who (or what) knows what?' But then wouldn't both the questions and the answers reflect not only on one's capacity to see things and events as the content of a text, but also on one's ability to think of the content of a text as an abstract pattern of one's behaviour and thinking in general?

§4

Primacy of event versus primacy of protagonist in plot

Aristotle, answering the question 'what is plot in a tragedy', makes a perfectly clear connection between the content of a tragedy and himself or 'ourselves', saying: 'it is about what (terrible things) happen to (or are done by) those who are either much better or much worse than

⁹'Action' here denotes a minimal unit of content of text in the perception and description of this text's receiver. This, of course, means *ipso facto* that one (at least) other text is being generated. At the same time, which is far more important, it may figure as a common denominator for all that is thinkable in the content of text, including thinking itself.

ourselves, or both'.¹⁰ And further he concludes this general definition of plot with a very important remark explaining the emotional effect of a tragedy on the audience: 'but it might or may happen to everyone'. What, however, this seemingly self-contradictory definition suggests is that though there is an essential difference between the protagonists (actual or potential) of a tragedy (on stage as well as in life) and the rest of people, there remains an abstract possibility for everyone to become such a protagonist. The implication of this would be an even more abstract possibility of separation or isolation of events, actions, and happenings in a plot from the type and individual characteristics of its protagonists, which presupposes the primacy of event: it is an event that determines a protagonist. On the other hand, if we stick to the primacy, or better, 'givenness' of a protagonist with his type and individual characteristics, then it would be he who determines or rather 'attracts' to himself events and actions constituting the plot.

§5

Introduction of 'situation'

It is this 'inner dualism' so intrinsic to the Aristotelian notion of *muthos as plot* that brings us a step closer to the, yet undisclosed, notion of *muthos as myth*. For indeed, is it not possible for us to ask now, whether we can regard the dualism 'protagonist/event' itself as mythological? To anticipate what will be discussed in Lecture Three I am bound to say that a plot cannot be based on any binary opposition. The opposition of the protagonist to the action, however principal and basic in a plot, does not suffice to form the whole of it. And that is why we have to leave for a while the ground of plot as that which, however abstracted from the content of a text and itself an abstraction, nevertheless remains a *temporal* abstraction dealing with things and events presented in time-sequences within the content, or with the *time* of our perception of or reflection on the plot, or with any other time. To introduce a notion of synchronicity in our deliberations on myth as a plot or a kind of plot, both being *abstractions of content*, we have to resort to one other notion—that of *situation*. It is situation that interrupts the unilinear diachrony of plot and allows the content to assume the fulness of its multi-dimensional composition.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. and commentary by Stephen Halliwell, London, Duck-worth, 1987 (*Aristotle*, or S.Halliwell, 1987), pp. 11 (S.Halliwell), 32, 47.

§6

Content as consisting of plot (diachronic) and situation (a-temporal)

A situation, in its relation to a plot, always represents its *a-temporal* side, a-temporal both in the sense that various elements of the content, which are described in the plot as distributed in time, would be perceived in a situation as a synchronical configuration, and in the sense that a whole plot or even the features and characteristics of plot in general would be perceived as related to no particular time or as related to any time whatsoever. So, the statement of Aristotle quoted above can be considered as a sort of 'situation with the plot of tragedy in general'. In principle, each and every plot can be summed up as a situation, and each and every situation can be analysed into stages of its sequence or formation and re-distributed in time, though as *a formal* notion, situation is more abstract and general in its relation to the content of a text and to a plot than plot in its relation to the content of a text and to situation, because of its a-temporal character. However, and this is very important for our further attempts to introduce the notion of myth, both *plot and situation are notions purely formal in their relation to the content of a text, while myth is not*. In other words, both plot and situation reveal themselves as two universal *modes of description* of the content of a text, as two ways of thinking about content which can be applied indiscriminately to any content as *forms* of its perception and, at the same time, as *thinkable principles* of its 'inner organisation'. Thus used, they seem to be practically tautological with the notion of content itself which, in fact, is nothing else than *content as plot and situation*.

§7

Situation known by the protagonists (inside knowledge), plot known by the observer (outside knowledge)

But a phenomenology of situation does not stop here. The situation figures *within* a plot side by side with protagonists and events. To put it more precisely, it figures very often as that which is *known* (thought, seen, heard, spoken of) by protagonists or narrators and expressed by them in the content of text as a kind of 'content within content'. At the same time, the very fact of such an expression is an act in the sequence of acts or events constituting the plot. Looked at from this angle, situation can be seen as a mental or conscious way of presenting a plot

within a plot, or a plot within a unit of a plot, and not a formal notion and term of description. Though it is in my power too, as an investigator of texts, to divide plots into situations or to reconstruct them from situations, situation would be seen as relatively more subjective than plot even from the point of view of an external observer, because, among other things, the protagonist *knows* the situation, when and if he describes it, and it is *his* knowledge, whether right or wrong from the point of view of the whole plot. But he cannot *a fortiori* know the whole plot from inside, otherwise he would annul it together with his own role of a protagonist. A plot, on the contrary, can be known by me, as an external observer (as well as by the narrator, the reader, the hearer, etc.) who has already construed it as a universal form of his perception of the *whole* content of text.

§8

Myth and the idea of pure content

A myth or the mythological, then, will be *something* in the content of a text, already perceived as a plot or a situation, something to which we are returning *via* plot and situation as the forms of this content; and, finally, something in the sense of which all thinkable and perceivable elements of this content, including its forms and the modes of its thinking and perception, would be thought and perceived as *pure content*.¹¹ Pure content I introduce here as a merely phenomenological notion. It cannot be postulated before, or used in the process of, interpretation of a given content. Only after the act of interpretation is completed, *post factum*, it appears in my thinking on mythology as an idea of content as individual and indivisible fact. A fact that cannot be either reconstructed as another fact, or de-constructed into its primary elements each carrying its own special mythological or epistemological meaning. Let us take, as an example, a part of the plot of Indra's story [see below in 3, I, (10)–(11)]: 'Indra drank in excess Soma in the house of Tvashtar, provided by the Eagle. After that he slew the dragon Vritra and liberated the waters.' My *mythological* (in the sense of a branch of science called 'mythology') perception of the passage, however banal,

¹¹ That is, a plot (or a situation) cannot be questioned the way a myth can (see fn. 1 here), because *formally* speaking, *I* have always known that plot and situation are that which is to be asked about its being or not being a myth. About the idea of pure context see above in [section 4](#) of Lecture One.

would be something to the effect that the Eagle, representing *solar* energy, provides the heavenly (*lunar?*) potation of Soma for Indra who is *atmospheric* energy, to slay the demon of waters Vritra. The last was produced from Soma and fire by Tvashtar, the demiurge of the world of visible forms, to kill Indra. The content of my interpretation of this passage is related to the content of this passage on the one hand as to an absolutely individual and, in itself, indivisible fact (*ethos*), and on the other, as to a sum total of bare facts together with their intentionalities, a sum total in which situation cannot be opposed to plot, or content to form, or interpretation to that which is interpreted, or space to time. If looked at from this angle, the passage can be seen as a pure content also in the sense that it can generate some other contents as, for instance, the content of a totally different myth based on an etymological perception of the name Indra ('strength', 'faculty', as here in 3, 1, 0), or for that matter, the content of my own mythological perception. But a pure content cannot be generated or invented intentionally *as a myth*. In saying this I mean that very individuality of content, not of text, that can exist only as *individuality of another*, not your, thinking. And if your thinking becomes a pure content it can do so only when it has already become an object for another thinking, or your own, provided that it became another too. Thus, if I say, 'Peter Jones, like Indra and Oedipus, killed his father, and like Oedipus slept with his mother', I am not recreating the pure content of a myth, because, by referring to the pure content of two individual myths (here I and II) I only reproduce what could be vaguely called a 'general mythological situation'. However, what I said now *can* become a pure content if someone else, or I *as* someone else, would refer to it as to an individual myth of another.

§9

*Myth in the sense of question (A) as an intentionality
of a text to change itself into content, of a kind to be
determined through plot and situation*

Thus, to put it in the sense of question (A), myth is an intentionality of (or within?) a text to be (or to change all of itself into) content, an intentionality that tends to neutralise such habitual thematic oppositions, used by those who ask of a myth 'what are you', as 'conscious/unconscious', 'form/content', 'sub-jjective/objective', etc., as merely formal, although, of course, these thematic oppositions may continue to be used by the investigator of myth in his *etic* approach to it. An answer to question (A) would only reveal that very intentionality

as a tendency inherent in some contents and, possibly, in the question itself too. Our task at hand is to present that intentionality as a content of a special kind, not each and every content. And it is at this point that we have to return from (A) to (C) and ask of a plot or a situation about the residue of pure content accumulated on its edges. And the answer we will get from them will be directed from within the content already understood as plot and situation. Yes, time is necessarily involved here, but only *within* the content represented as a plot and situation; however, the very idea of *diachrony*, as a category in a mythological investigation, can be applied to the content only provided that the last also contains *non-time* as its own, not mine, idea or myth!

Enough of generalisations! Myth will evade us until we are able to recognise it in the content of texts, including those of our own mythological investigations, as something, though very specific, but at the same time very universal. And to show its specific character and universal quality we shall start demonstrating them in various texts and in our approach to and description of these texts.¹²

The answers, however inadequate, to the question ‘what is myth’ stand as a general introduction to the nine mythological examples discussed below. We now move from tentative theoretical premises to practical exploration of the notions that arise out of myth itself.

3

THE ASPECTS OF MYTH (INDRA’S PLOT)

I.(0)1.¹³ Before the existence of the universe there was the non-existent (*asat*), that is, the Rishis, that is, the vital airs (*prāṇas*) which desired the existence of this universe and wore themselves out by austerity (*tapas*) to produce it.

(0)2. Indra, being one of these vital airs, kindled all of them, from the midst, by his power (*indriya*).

¹² The plots or clusters of plots will be numbered in Roman numbers from now on.

¹³ Each episode here is an arbitrarily singled out segment of the content of a text.

(0)3. They, being kindled, created seven separate persons (*puruṣa*), and by compressing themselves together they made

Prajāpati who is the very Agni, the fire altar which is now to be built.¹⁴

I(1) Indra created the universe out of undifferentiated chaos, and divided the world into earth and sky.¹⁵

(2) Indra created his mother and father from his own body.¹⁶

(3) Having conceived Indra, his mother did not want to deliver him [probably out of fear that his father would kill him?]¹⁷ and bore him for a thousand months.¹⁸

(4) The gods were afraid of the warrior Indra...and while still within (his mother's) womb they fettered him with a bond.¹⁹

(5) In the end she would let him be born 'by the ancient and accepted (i.e., natural) pathway by which all gods have come into

¹⁴ *Śatapathabrāhmaṇam* ed. by Vidyādharaśamagaṇḍa and Candradharaśarma, Kāśī, 1936(?), I, VI (building of the fire-altar), 1, 1–5, pp. 697–9. *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, trans. by Julius Eggeling, Part III, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894, pp. 143–4. Here Indra drops out from the cosmogonic process, still at its inception, the reason for which is the specifically sacrificial character of the text.

¹⁵ This is a commonplace in the Rigveda and post-Vedic literature stressing Indra's cosmogonic function. He is also referred to as the god who created Heaven and Sun, though to call him a god-creator would be rather a forced conclusion for in his central role he remains the Ruler of this universe and the King of Gods.

¹⁶ Radhakrishnan, S. *The Principal Upaniṣads*, London, G. Allen and Unwin, 1953 (S. Radhakrishnan, 1953), p. 59. Unfortunately, the late Radhakrishnan does not make any reference to the source of his quotation, but even if he had taken it from 'gossip' of private traditional interpretation, to me it would remain a text, content, a plot, or one of the elements of the last.

¹⁷ This is a conjecture that justifies the behaviour and intentions of Indra's mother and explains the further development of the plot. See in *The Rigveda*, I–IV, trans. and commentary by T. Elizarenkova (in Russian), Moscow, Nauka, 1989 (T. Elizarenkova, 1989), pp. 739–5. Also in: Brown, W.N. *Indra's Infancy according to Rigveda*, IV, 18, Siddha-Charati, Hoshiapur, 1950, pp. 131–6.

¹⁸ Aufrecht, Th. *Die Hymnen des Rigveda*, 3 Auflage, Berlin, 1955 (*Rigveda*), IV, 18, 4.

¹⁹ *The Veda of the Black Yajus School* entitled *Taittiriya Saṁhita*, Part I, trans. by A.B. Keith, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. XVIII, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1967 (1914), p. 186.

existence...but Indra said: 'Not this way go I forth, bad is this passage'...and made his exit from her body through her side.²⁰

(6) When Indra was born she hid him [from his father who sought to kill him?] and left him, 'an unlicked calf', alone in the wilderness.²¹

(7) Vyansa, his father, found Indra, 'struck him to the ground, and smote his jaws in pieces'.²²

(8) Indra took his father by the foot, slew him, and made his mother widow.²³

(9) All alone he lived in his childhood, left by his mother, forsaken by the gods. So destitute was he that he had to cook a dog's intestines.²⁴

(10) The Eagle brought him the sweet potation of Soma that he drank in profusion in the house of Tvashtar, and god Vamadeva (Vishnu) helped him by making three strides measuring the universe.²⁵

(11) Then Indra slew the dragon Vritra lying on the mountain, with his Thunderbolt Vajra...fashioned by Tvashtar, disclosed the waters, and cleft the channels of the mountain torrents.²⁶

[(12) After that Indra started rebuilding his celestial capital. He rebuilt it again and again on end and, in connection with this, received Divine instruction from Shiva and Vishnu.]²⁷

²⁰ *Rigveda*, IV, 18, 2.

²¹ *Id.*, IV, 18, 10. Here and thereafter I follow *The Hymns of Rigveda*, trans. with a popular commentary by R.T. H.Griffith, Vol. I, The Chowkamba Sanskrit Studies, Vol. XXV, Varanasi, 1971 [R.Griffith, 1971 (1889)], p. 417.²² *Rigveda* IV, 18, 9; R.Griffith [1971 (1889)] quotes from a commentary suggesting that this episode took place when Indra was yet unborn (p. 417, n. 12).

²³ *Rigveda*, IV, 18, 12.

²⁴ *Id.*, IV, 18, 13. The gods might have forsaken him because he slew his father.

²⁵ *Id.*, IV, 18, 3; T.Elizarenkova, 1989, p. 735.

²⁶ *Rigveda*, I, 32, 1–2.

²⁷ This passage evolved in a lengthy plot in the *Brahmavaivarta-Purāna* will be discussed in Lecture Five.

(13) Indra seduced Ahalya, the wife of the great Rishi Gautama, for which transgression he was emasculated for 100 years and she turned into stone for the same length of time.²⁸

(14) Indra ravished his daughter.²⁹

§1

The protagonist as the unifying principle of Indra's plot

These are only a few of hundreds of episodes ascribed to Indra throughout ancient and mediaeval Indian texts. Each of them, probably with the one exception of (o), can be regarded as a *micro-plot*, or a combination of two or more actions which, in principle, might have been attributed to as many *subjects* or *persons* as there are episodes. However, if taken together they form, as it were, *one* plot. Only one for the reason that in actual fact there is one principle unifying all of them into one plot—Indra himself. But who is Indra?³⁰ This question alone leaves a lot to be answered, for if Indra is more than a formal pretext whereby all these episodes form one sequence of actions and configuration of events, then we have to look at him as that which is itself a myth or something mythological. If not, then we should be conjecturing about something else in these episodes that would connect all of them together, irrespective of to whom or what they are ascribed as their subject or 'agent'.

§2

The manifest and unmanifest states of Indra: transcendental entity, creator, and embodied god

In **I(0)** Indra was a *transcendental* entity, called the 'non-existent', a 'Rishi', and a vital air. Transcendental, and not supernatural, for there was no nature there, at the beginning. [Or rather, we'd better say the other

²⁸ This episode is numerously described or mentioned in the Puranas, particularly in the *Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa*.

²⁹ Neither this episode nor the fact of Indra's having a daughter has ever been mentioned in any of the classical sources Sanskrit or vernacular. It was allegedly told to Dr Audrey Cantlie by one of her tantrist informants in Bengal as a weighty reason not to worship or revere Indra. I rate it as a text (or a part of a legend?) in its own full right (see above, n. 16).

³⁰ Or more exactly, 'what kind of person is Indra?'

way round—in the beginning there was a part of the non-existent, a Rishi, a vital air, who was Indra.] Nor was he *a person*, for a person was not yet created either. This is the shortest description of a situation where Indra was as he was, without a universe to create or to be created, without time in a universe, and without a ‘person’, for the last would be either creator or something created.

In (1)–(2) Indra as a *god* created the World and his father and mother. In doing this he was a person. Or, shall we say, he must have become so *before* or, at least, *in* his act of creating or differentiating the universe, because, it might be conjectured, that somewhere between (0) and (1) he changed from a transcendental entity into a personal god. I say ‘somewhere’, and not ‘sometime’ for the reason that strictly mythologically speaking, i.e., in the sense of ancient, *Indian* mythology, time is secondary to and derivative from, creation. As regards the *time of creation* itself, of that we know nothing ‘Real’ time started only after the process of differentiation, temporal or a-temporal, was completed, Indra’s parents produced and he himself conceived.³¹

In (3)–(5) Indra is born as a concrete god, i.e., known as such and worshipped by gods and men, as well as a concrete, i.e., concretely manifested, **person**. The latter means that from his birth onwards he will not only be known and worshipped by the others but included in *their* time. This would embrace the *micro-cosmic time* of their worship of him, in the first place,³² the *macro-cosmic time* of his life and exploits as they know them, in the second, and the *cosmic time* of the whole *cycle* of Indra. Indra’s time and Indra’s person coincide here, one cannot find one *manifestation* without the other. The birth (or conception?) of Indra is a landmark which divides Indra’s unmanifested and manifested states or phases of his existence in a given cosmic cycle.³³ Each cosmic cycle, in ancient and early mediaeval Indian mythology, has *three* phases for each of its gods:³⁴ unmanifested (before the creation), manifested (during the existence of the world created), and unmanifested (after its end). It would be necessary, in this connection, to note that the state of Indra described in I(0) was that of his *non-*

³¹ This follows from his dialogue with his mother when Indra, still in the womb, did not wish to be born in the natural way.

³² Such is, for instance, the time when the fire-altar of Agni is built in I(o).

³³ The question of cycles and Indra’s cycles in particular will be treated in Lecture Five.

³⁴ And for all persons too.

existence or *pre-existence* and could, therefore, be regarded as the unmanifested phase in the *whole* of existence, and not only in the existence of Indra and his world.³⁵ So Indra created his father and mother to be born in another, manifested phase of his existence, and to do that he had to reproduce supernaturally a natural situation of his birth. It is his birth or rather his conception that made possible the whole *story* both in the sense of its being a story (or myth!) of god (*deva*) Indra, and in the sense of its being mythological *per se*, that is, irrespective, in principle at least, of whom or what it is about.³⁶ Or, if we return to our questioning about myth at the beginning of this lecture, the story will reveal itself as a story of a *mythical being*, in the first place, as a story of *mythical actions or events*, in the second, and as a story whose elements (i.e., these very beings, actions, and events) are *configured in a way that we would call mythological*, in the third. I call these aspects, for convention's sake, *typological*, *topological*, and *modal*. Such is, as a first approximation, the three-aspectedness of the mythical.

A THE TYPOLOGICAL ASPECT

§3.

The transformability of gods between classes of beings

To me the story of Indra suggests that a classical conception of gods as 'forces and phenomena of nature personified' does not fit in here, and where it does this personification is secondary and derivative. The primary notion is the idea of the existence of beings or classes of being that are essentially different from other being or classes of beings, human or animal, essentially different in that *while being what they are*,³⁷ they can change from one class to another, or even from being into

³⁵ The whole here may be the universe of god Brahma.

³⁶ This reflects an elementary dualism of myth, the concept of which seems quite insufficient to convey the idea of a myth as phenomenologically complex. As, for instance, in I.Dyakonov [*The Archaic Myths of East and West* (in Russian), Moscow, Nauka, 1990 (I.Dyakonov, 1990), p. 117]:... 'Myths are plot-units each of which is connected with a "moving force", a *deity*...'

³⁷ This will be further explained later.

non-being and the other way round, etc. You may call them 'supernatural' in the most elementary sense of the word: an ability of transformation and self-transformation. This is their most general property. So, like other natural beings, Indra was conceived by father and mother, was happy and unhappy, miserable and triumphant, malicious and benevolent. But unlike other natural beings, Indra had created his parents prior to being conceived by them and, more importantly, *changed himself into an ant*.³⁸ In doing so he reversed the course of nature, his own nature inclusive, because being supernatural includes in itself also a supernatural ability to be natural. Moreover, only on the strength of his belonging to the class of these supernatural 'mutants' and 'mutators' was Indra the god of thunder, atmosphere, and warfare, and not the other way round. For, and it is clearly observed in so many Vedic, epic, Puranic, and folk-lore texts, it is not because of being 'thunder personified' that Indra is a god (*deva*), but because of his possessing the concrete properties of a god that he is thunder personified, the King of Gods, the Great leader of Arian warriors, and the great consumer of Soma.

§4

Introduction of the notion of the 'transcendental' beyond the supernatural and the natural

The story of Indra, however, does not allow for a banal binary opposition of 'natural/supernatural', because such an opposition has a meaning only *within* the realm of nature, or the 'created', and by definition cannot be applied to the 'supernatural' or the 'creator', in Indian mythology at any rate. That is why we have to introduce here the notion of the *transcendental* as that which is outside the realm of the supernatural as well as the natural and, thereby, lies outside both creation and created. Indra, thus, in **I(0)**, as a Rishi or a vital air, pre-exists himself as the creator or differentiator of the world; in his creating or differentiating the world in **I(1)** (together with creating his parents) he pre-exists himself as 'born'; and in his being supernaturally born he pre-exists himself as a god-person (*deva*) Indra committing various actions, supernatural and natural, and forming the plot of our story. So

³⁸ *Rigveda*, I, S1, 9; T.Elizarenkova, 1990, p. 66. About *an ant as Indra* (not the other way round!) see *The Parade of Ants* in Lecture Five, though in this case the situation of Indra's transformation was *not intentional but karmic*.

the triad 'transcendental/supernatural/natural' would be the most general way of classifying all the actions and situations of the whole plot, if we describe it from the point of view of the supernatural.

§5

Introduction of the notion of the 'extra-ordinary'

From the point of view of the natural, however, the story of Indra does not allow for the use of this binary opposition either. In **I(3)–(5)** we have not only a mixture of actions natural [e.g. his conception (?), his despair, anger, and hunger] with supernatural (e.g. his arguing with his mother in her womb, exit through her side, and drinking *soma* brought by the Eagle), but also the actions and events which, though not 'technically' supernatural, would look very *strange* from the point of view of the natural: his being left by his mother, while still an infant, in the wilderness, his eating dog's intestines when hungry, the, however apocryphal, incestuous relations with his daughter, and above all, his killing his father. It is these actions and situations which form what I would call the *extra-ordinary*, a descriptive category which would make our customary mythological opposition a triad: the natural/the supernatural/the extra-ordinary.

It is in the sense of this triad that the extra-ordinary acquires its phenomenological edge, so to speak, as an idea where the subjective, i.e., self-perception, self-awareness, self-knowledge, merges with the objectivity of one's *type*, or *class of beings*. Indra's actions and the events that befall him, though they single him out from other beings of his class (gods, *devas*), cannot be accounted for by the mere fact of his *transcending* it as a transcendental rishi. [For, indeed, one cannot be extra-ordinary among the transcendental beings—the idea of the transcendental cancels automatically the triad of the natural/the extra-ordinary/the supernatural.] Because here the extra-ordinary always *exceeds one's nature*, be it human, divine, or even one's own nature (*svabhāva*) for that matter. [Although, again, there can be no nature whatsoever in the transcendental.] In terms of *ordinary* perception of an extra-ordinary action, it can be imagined as provoking a remark like 'O, it could have been done by (or befallen to) only him (her)'. This implies on the one hand the subjectivity of personal responses, but on the other an objective knowledge of one's *élitist* status (in terms of classes of beings); but both are not given (perceived) separately here.

Again, it may be supposed that the triad, the natural/the supernatural/the extra-ordinary could be, again, applied to a description of each of its three members taken separately. So, for instance, from **I(4)** it follows that to be born from mother's side is as extra-ordinary among gods as it is among men (so that we have here, 'the extra-ordinary within the supernatural) in which case Indra would figure as an 'extra-ordinary god' too.³⁹

§6

The extra-ordinariness of Indra

This extra-ordinariness of Indra *as a person* is referred to by the poets of the Vedas as that which goes without saying, so to speak, and had been remembered by the Indian Arians probably long before they became Indians, that is, when the Arians were not yet split into Indians and Iranians, and Indra was already the reputed Dragon-Slayer (Avest. *Vritrahan*). The last [here **I(11)**] is particularly interesting, not only because of its great antiquity but also because it adds to the atmosphere of ambiguity that surrounds Indra, *as a person*, from time immemorial stressing the strangeness of his actions and situations. In the Avestan context he was also a *deva*, a demon rather than a god or benevolent deity (*ahura*), though like Indra of the *Rigveda*, he killed the 'same' demon Vritra. It is very significant, however, that in a strange way the Vedic Indra inherited the ambiguity of his Avestan predecessor as if they were the *same person*. For if the former, though a demon, killed another terrible demoniac creature, the latter, though a god, by killing the 'same' demon Vritra, committed the most flagrant transgression. Because, as we see it in the *Puranas*, Vritra, that hideous snake-like shape, no-beast, no-man, and no-god either, is, strangely enough, a *brahman*, for whose killing Indra would be severely punished. This rather queer re-interpretation of the central episode in the plot of Indra's life may well be regarded as yet another instance of the mythological ambiguity produced by a combination of diverse classes of beings in one divine or supernatural person. So, Indra, though a *deva*, was punishable for a natural (human) transgression, and Vritra, though a

³⁹ Virgin Mary says: 'How could the Son be born from the very pure side...' From an 'Acafist to Virgin Mary', in *An Orthodox Prayer book and Psalter* (in Church-Slavonic), Moscow, 1988, p. 57.

demon, was a brahman.⁴⁰ In fact, in both contexts, Iranian and Indian alike, Indra belongs to a class of supernatural beings but, as a supernatural being, he is able, temporarily or permanently, simultaneously or diachronically, to belong to, change into, or assume some features of some other classes of beings, supernatural or natural, while remaining *himself*. Though, what ‘himself’ may mean in the context of our plot would be pretty difficult to say, because of an intermingling of the natural, the extra-ordinary, and the supernatural in **I (1)–(11)** in the first place, and an intermingling of the natural, the supernatural, and the transcendental in **I(0)–I(1–14)** in the second. But about ‘self’ a little further.

§7.

Inverse identification of Indra in the non-existent

Indra was a strange *person*, forsaken by his mother, killing his father, and eating dog’s intestines. He was a strange *deva* too, producing supernaturally his parents, being delayed in his birth for 1,000 months, coming out through his mother’s side and afterwards forsaken by other *devas*. And, at last, coming *back* to his *a-temporal* pre-existence, what was (or is!) he then?⁴¹ Or, more importantly, what was he doing there

⁴⁰ I have to note here that Vritra was (or *became* much later in the Puranas) a brahman not in the way Indra was a kshatriya. For the latter was the leader of warriors (*kṣatriyas*) by definition, while the former *happened to be* a brahman by a hindsight to emphasise the ambiguity of the latter.

⁴¹ ‘Back’ here is a manner of speaking, for in **I(0)** Indra was, as it were, invoked each time that ritual of Agni was being prepared. The ritual context here poses a very interesting question of the relation of the supernatural to the category of sacredness. All said and done, we may say that ‘the sacred’ is given to the external observer in a *phenomenon* (ritual, myth, etc.) which might be described as a *whole* (*ethos*), or as a function or a cluster of functions. Whereas ‘the supernatural’ is a purely *relational notion* in the phenomenology of myth, i.e., a notion which cannot be simply used as a term of description of the facts observed, but which can be used in an *interpretation* of those facts by the observer (and sometimes by the observed too). So, when we read in a commentary on a passage from the *Rig Veda* the ‘*soma* which one gives to Indra is not the real soma’, we understand that, using our language of description, the *soma* which we give and drink is *sacred*, but there is another *soma* which is supernatural, and when we are told that the meaning and power of the ritual cannot be realised by its performers, for such a realisation is about performance itself, then meaning and power can be described as supernatural in relation to the sacredness of the ritual.

and then? But, *of what* am I asking these questions?—of our text **I(0)**. And, following this text again, we will see that the questions are wrong, for it is not asked there ‘who was Indra?’ But ‘what was the non-existent?’ And then, having answered that it was the Rishis who were the vital airs, it was said that one of these is Indra, or is *called* Indra. For, indeed we cannot ask, ‘who was he (Indra)?’ because *that* that was ‘at the beginning’ could not be *him* in the context of **I(0)**, for there was no *person* (*puruṣa*) there and then. Only a person can be natural or supernatural, ordinary or extra-ordinary in that context, and Indra was a ‘self’ and *the name of a person to be*, but by no means a person. Here we have the phenomenon of *inverse identification*, that is, when it is *something unknown, indefinite, or ‘less definite than...’ which is identified as something concrete or ‘more concrete than...’, not the other way round*. [Or, to put it in terms of self-awareness, when *the other is identified as I, not I as the other*.]⁴²

§8

Cosmogonic view of Indra as the name of a person to be

As a part of the ‘non-existent’, that is, as a Rishi, that is, as a vital air, Indra, like the rest of them, *desired* the existence of the universe, and *wore himself out with toil and austerity*. These two actions, desire (*icchā*) and *ascetic exertion* (*tapas, śrama*) were not his, for in them he did not differ from the rest of the non-existent. Only when, being one of the vital airs, he *kindled*, from their midst, all of them, was he called ‘Indra’ for his *energy* (*indriya*) different from and complementary to the *energy of inner ascetic exertion* (*tapas*). It is, in fact, from this moment only that a part of the non-existent identified as Indra, or to put it in terms of inverse identification, that which had pre-existed, *as a name*, the action of *kindling by outward energy*, became the name of that action. The name prefigures the action here, so to speak, and desiring, exerting oneself ascetically and kindling by outward energy can be seen as three steps towards Indra’s (and not anybody else’s in that context) *person-ness*.

⁴² Likewise, no one asked Indra in *The Parade of Ants* (in Lecture Five), ‘who art thou?’ The question Indra himself asked was ‘what are these ants?’ And the answer was, ‘they are Indras’.

§9

*Mythic view of Indra as an 'extra-ordinary' person
who includes thereby a transcendental phase of
proto-existence*

I(0) is a typical example of a cosmogonic myth within a ritual context, where the direction of the plot coincides with that of the ritual. But if we take **I(0)** as a description of the *transcendental* (and unmanifested by definition) *phase* of the plot of Indra's life, the whole picture is changed. Indra, to be⁴³ a transcendental entity, a Rishi or a vital air, has to be a *named proto-person*, the kindler of vital airs and possessor of *indriya*. To be a named proto-person he has to be a member of one of the classes or orders of supernatural beings, the order of *devas* (i.e., gods, for want of a better rendering) to whom the sacrificial rituals are performed, the *soma* pressed and the hymns sung, and whose personness is realised in his taking part in the cosmogonic process ending in his conception. But to be a *deva* he has to be an extraordinary person, a strange character and a stranger to *other* gods and men. I am inclined to regard his extraordinariness as the point of departure in a phenomenology of his divinity, as the direction of the plot of his myth goes from his being extraordinary person to his being a part of non-being, not the other way round as we see it in his cosmogony. This direction of mythical events, actions, and circumstances I would, for convention's sake, call 'anti-cosmic'.

§10

The extra-ordinary traits of Indra's life

But now we are confronted with two crucial questions, already anticipated above. The first question is: what is the place of the extraordinary in the universal classification of beings in ancient Indian taxonomy? Or more concretely: to what unit of ancient Indian 'classification of beings' does *our* class of the extra-ordinary correspond? Of course, it goes without saying that our classification of beings into the natural, the extra-ordinary, and the supernatural is all too general and rough. The *devas*, *asuras* (demons), and *pitars* (ancestors) may be regarded as three main taxons (units of classification) approximately corresponding to the supernatural, if put in a more or less

⁴³ I put here 'to be' instead of 'to become' quite purposefully, so that 'temporality' should be avoided and 'time' suspended.

hierarchical order. The *devas*, in their turn, were divided into several groups. So Indra, being a *deva*, belongs to a sub-division of *devas* called *ādityas* (the sons of Āditi) and, probably, to a sub-sub-division of *devas* called Indras. At the same time his was the extra-ordinary life of an extra-ordinary person, a life clearly marked by the following traits:

A. transgression [he killed his father (8), he killed Vritra who was a brahman (11), he ate dog's intestines (9), he seduced Ahalya (13), he ravished his daughter (19), etc.]; **B. excess** [he drank enormous quantities of *soma* (10), he was insatiable in his sexual appetites (passim), he could not stop rebuilding his celestial capital (12), etc.];⁴⁴ **C. separateness or loneliness** [he was left in the wilderness by his mother (6), forsaken by the gods (9), etc.]; **D. privation** [his feet were fettered (4), he was severely beaten by his father (7), he suffered hunger and loneliness (6) and (9), he was emasculated (13), etc.]. **E. ambiguity** [he had to kill his father who wanted to kill him, and by slaying Vritra he became the greatest benefactor of the world, though by doing so he committed the most terrible sin of killing a *brahman*, etc.]

The last trait is of particular interest. It stands, as it were, apart, for it marks an observer's position rather than Indra's actions and situations as such. This trait is called for only when an action or situation of one order of beings can be thought of or interpreted as *relative*, i.e., in relation to another order. So, in our case, when Indra killed his father all the 'ordinary' gods forsook him. But Vishnu, who was a *transcendental* god, stood by him, his parricide notwithstanding, for he knew him to be an 'extra-ordinary' god exempt from the law of the supernatural, let alone the natural. The same applies to his killing of Vritra, lawful from the point of view of the supernatural, but radically re-interpreted in the Puranic tradition where the point of view of the natural was combined with that of the supernatural, and, where Indra was downgraded to a position of the most natural amongst the supernatural beings.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ About this see below in Lecture Five.

⁴⁵ My presentation of ambiguity here is too simplified. A phenomenology of ambiguity starts only when *another level implies another (and higher!) knowledge*—whether the knowledge of a being of a higher order or the knowledge of an external observer playing the part of a 'third party'—the knowledge which is not explicit in **I(9)**. That is why T.Elizarenkova (1989, p. 735) adduces the arguments pertaining to the *natural* to explain the dubious (ambiguous) action of Indra's mother who forsook him in the wilderness (also a clear example of extra-ordinary behaviour).

§11

Encompassing nature of the 'extra-ordinary'

However, none of the first four traits taken separately can account for the extra-ordinariness of Indra. It is a combination of all (or at least three) of them that would make him the 'who' or 'what' of myth, i.e., the *subject* of myth in the sense of *its first aspect* as introduced above. And it is this combination of traits that calls for a parallel with the traits by which one other order of beings is marked as a whole—the order of Rishis. The Rishis, initially the great Vedic hymnodists, divine ancestors, progenitors of the great brahmanic families (*gotras*), and the seven stars of Ursa Major personified, became in the post-Vedic and Puranic traditions associated with supernatural asceticism and acquisition of supernatural power (*tapas*), and formed a class of supernatural *and* extra-ordinary ascetics who, at the same time, were great ancestors. Their power made them more powerful than gods. So they eventually came to be regarded as a kind of *universal* class of beings, which represents the whole triad of the natural/the supernatural/the extra-ordinary. Moreover, it is their extraordinariness that made them 'jump', so to speak, beyond this triad into the triad of the natural/supernatural/transcendental, where they became associated with the last. For, both as a concrete class of beings, i.e., as rishis, and as the concrete content of the notion, *the extra-ordinary tends to transcend not only its own class but the whole classification system very generally described by a triad of the natural/the extra-ordinary/the supernatural*. Furthermore, the extra-ordinary also tends to *neutralise* any binary opposition—such as, in our case, the natural/the supernatural, and the natural and the supernatural versus the transcendental—remaining, itself, the least fixed member of its triad.

§12

The extra-ordinariness inherent in the idea of person

Consequently, as middle member of the triad and, as it were, intermediary class of beings, the extra-ordinary figures as a principle working in the other members and classes on the one hand, and as a principle *connecting* them with one another, on the other. As such, it neither mediates between them nor substitutes them in their interaction in a plot, but exemplifies and actualises the 'strangeness' inherent in the very idea of *person*, which far exceeds the limits of any class of the triad, the natural/the extra-ordinary/the supernatural, as well as the triad

itself. A person, in this sense, is not necessarily a man, and a man is not a person by definition.⁴⁶ Indra, the warrior, womaniser, a prodigy amongst gods, destined to defeat Vritra was objectively, i.e., from outside the plot of his story, as it were, *anti-brahman*, i.e., he was connected with the class of beings called *brahmans* by his outright transgression of the brahmanical law. At the same time, he was subject, for these very transgressions, to the punishments and penances that, objectively again, connected him with rishis or even made him a kind of rishi. So in being *anti-rishi* by virtue of such traits as **A** (transgression) and **B** (excess) he was a rishi by virtue of **C** (separateness) and **D** (privation). This, in a way, reflects the fact that one cannot be a brahman while being a warrior (whether human or divine), but one can be a *rishi* while being a member of any class or sub-class of beings whatsoever. Because rishi is a universal category in a manner analogous to that in which person is a universal category in a universe subsumed under the triad, 'the natural/the extra-ordinary/the supernatural', i.e., in the world ruled by Indra. And that is why, among other things, in the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* this very extra-ordinariness of Indra, the most 'natural' among the *devas*, is projected 'back' into the transcendental of the triad 'the natural/the supernatural/the transcendental' to assume there the name of Indra first, and the denotation *rishi* as a part of the non-existent, second. But what is, then, the idea of person (*puruṣa*) in the sense in which we have treated the idea of the extra-ordinary?

§13

The 'extra-ordinary' in Indra as non-psychical

To answer this question we have first to note that the distinction of the extra-ordinary, marked, in the case of Indra as a rishi, by the traits **A—D**, is *not psychical (or mental)*, but purely *objective*. So, for instance, Indra's unwillingness to be born the way natural to gods and men, and his extra-ordinary wish to exit through his mother's side, referred to in **I(5)**, are both *actions*, i.e., they are not opposed to one another as a mental

⁴⁶ To Heidegger strangeness ('being *thus*') is imputed to man *a fortiori*. In his metaphysical commentary on the famous song in Sophocles' *Antigone* he stresses that 'the strange' is both that which singles out man from all other beings and that which singles out an extra-ordinary man from all other men. His is an anthropological phenomenology that equates man to person. Heidegger, Martin. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by R. Manheim, Yale University Press, London and New Haven, 1959 [M. Heidegger, 1959 (1953)], pp. 145–150.

state to an action here. And this is so for the single reason that no Vedic ritualistic text allows for such an opposition.⁴⁷ Because, the very idea of the ‘psychical’ (or of ‘psychism’—a term introduced by Rōgi von Rims) becomes meaningful and relevant to our investigation only when differences of actions in different beings are reduced to or represented in their individual psychical or mental differences, and not the other way round. Then ‘person’ would be a term denoting the *subject* of these differences. The ‘person-ness’ of Indra can be inferred from the *Rigveda*; it actually emerges from a *re-interpretation* of his extraordinary deeds in the post-Vedic sources, the Brahmanas and Puranas, where their extraordinariness serves as a point of departure and a basis for the whole train of symbolic constructions and metaphysical speculations concerning Indra and other beings divine, human, and transcendental.

§14

Being (sattva) as a general category

But why being? Because it is as a *being (sattva)* that Indra figures prior to being or becoming a god, or a person, or anything else. Since the middle of the first millennium B.C. *sattva* plays the role of the most general *formal* notion covering practically all objects of all classificatory systems.

⁴⁸ I call it formal, because it has no specific context of its own, which it acquires only by inclusion of one or other class or sub-class of beings or by assuming some individual or personal characteristics.⁴⁹ So, in this connection, Indra is a being, a supernatural being, a god (*deva*), an Aditya, and an extra-ordinary person whose extra-ordinariness is manifested in the class of rishis and transcends its system to retroact as a rishi in the transcendental, called Indra.

⁴⁷ It is worthy of note that the Vedic ritual *action* is described by a triad ‘mental performance/speech performance/material (physical) performance’, the Vedic *speech* by a triad ‘intentional speech/inner speech/outer speech’, and, for the sake of completeness, the Buddhist *thought*, by a triad ‘thought/speech/action’.

⁴⁸ *Rigveda*, II, 8, 15.

⁴⁹ It would be very interesting to note a specifically *negative* characterisation of Vritra in this connection, for Vritra is marked by the absence of classificatory features (or differential elements), being neither a man, nor god, nor rishi and ‘becoming’ a brahman by exclusion, so to speak. In other words, it was an extra-ordinary being rather than an extra-ordinary person.

§15

Indra as 'self' (ātman)

But Indra is not exhausted by being a being and a person—and here we have to fall back on the previous question about Indra *himself*—for it is in the post-Vedic context of the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* that the third notion emerges, that of self, *ātman*. Unlike a being (*sattva*), a self (*ātman*) cannot be anything but itself. It is not subject to any classification and cannot be one thing or another or, least of all, *become* what it is. And unlike a person (*puruṣa*), it has neither distinction from another self, nor a name (*nāma*) to mark this distinction. From this follows that a self has no *psychism*, for there can be no difference in *mentality* between selves. And that is why, a self cannot, strictly speaking, figure as a protagonist in any ancient or early mediaeval plot. And if it can, it will be only by way of introduction, as an ontological point of departure or a 'zero situation' that is postulated to explain not a further development of this very plot (namely **I** in Indra's case), but of any plot real, thinkable or imaginable. Therefore, Indra's self is, as it were, relegated to **I(0)** in the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* to give way subsequently to Indra as a being and person enacting his role in the plot **I**, while 'his' self remains in the background of eternity and timelessness.

§16

The mythological characteristics of Indra

So, summing up all that has been said of Indra, we may conclude that mythology here is his acting in the plot, moving from being an extra-ordinary person through being a supernatural being towards being a self in the transcendental, whence the cosmic process starts all over again in the opposite direction, i.e., from Indra as self to Indra as extra-ordinary person. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, the mythological about Indra is not that he is a supernatural being belonging to the class of *devas*, but that he is an extra-ordinary person, a rishi, and a god who *precedes* himself as a transcendental being called rishi. And finally, Indra is a mythological figure because *objectively*—that is, not necessarily knowing it himself—he figures as a timeless self, an a-temporal being, and a person shifting from the temporality of being to the timelessness of self [or of the non-existent, in **I(0)**]. The subjective, i.e., his own reflection or knowledge of *what he is* is present in **I(0)** only as a potentiality symbolised by *desire* (*icchā*) not yet singled out from

action and the psychical.⁵⁰ At this point we leave Indra and return to the plot.

B THE TOPOLOGICAL ASPECT

§17

The 'extra-ordinary' as a 'shifter' within and between systems of classification

In the plot **I** we are, again, face to face with that orientation to the extra-ordinary which strikes the investigator of myths when he observes Indra as a person. As in the case of his 'person-ness' the extra-ordinary in his plot is a mighty *shifter* that reproduces the situations peculiar to one taxon of one classificatory system in another taxon of the same system only to shift from one system to another and end up with finding itself in the transcendental from where 'the buck cannot be passed further', so to speak, for there will be no next dealer.

So, it is the plot itself that exhibits the extra-ordinary in the sequence of its situations, from (1) to (14) and the other way round, from (14) to (0). However, this is *not a temporal sequence* determined by the habitual empirical perception of '*post hoc est propter hoc*' type, but a merely *spatial sequence* determined by another type of perception—a perception of events as *configured* in or within the *space of a text*. Moreover, it is the extra-ordinary acts or events which, though very often intermittent and alternating with non-extraordinary ones, form their own configurations constituting, sometimes, whole plots or sub-plots. So, on the one hand we have a configuration of actions and events wherein the extra-ordinary is mixed with the supernatural and the natural, where the first figures as a connecting (but not motivating) factor that makes the whole configuration mythological:

(1) the supernatural; (2) the extra-ordinary *in* the supernatural; (3) the extra-ordinary in the natural (as regards Indra's mother who was natural by definition, i.e., by virtue of being *created*) plus the supernatural (as regards Indra himself);⁵¹ (4) the extraordinary in the supernatural; (5) the

⁵⁰ According to R.von Rims, the psychical becomes actualised in a text only when its narrator becomes himself a protagonist in the plot.

⁵¹ Because the created is natural *par excellence* in these texts, anyway, which is a specifically Indian philosophical metaphor.

extra-ordinary in the natural *and* in the supernatural; (6) the extra-ordinary in the natural (as regards Indra's mother again) and in the supernatural; (7) the extra-ordinary in the natural [again as in (3), (5), and (6)]; (8) the extra-ordinary in the supernatural; (9) the extra-ordinary in the supernatural and the natural; (10) the supernatural; (11) the supernatural; (12) the supernatural (plus the extra-ordinary in the supernatural plus the transcendental, *see n. 26*); (13) the extraordinary in the supernatural and in the natural; (14) the extraordinary in the supernatural and in the natural.

§18

*The absolute objectivity of mythological
configurations as neither causally nor
semantically linked*

On the other hand, however, the whole plot can be presented as a configuration of merely extra-ordinary acts and events, i.e., as (2)–(9) plus (13)–(14). The actions and events in this configuration do not follow one another as a sequence of actions and events, nor do they cause one another but, as suggested above, they are inter-connected *topologically*, that is, in the space of the text, which is their 'time'. Thus, in (3) where 'Indra's mother did not want to deliver him and bore him for a thousand months', it is not because she 'did not want' that she 'bore him for a thousand months', for the latter fact is related to Indra as well as to her and cannot be accounted for by the former. Because that which can be regarded as an extra-ordinary *natural* event in her case exists as an 'ordinary' supernatural event in his.⁵² Moreover, a cluster of extra-ordinary actions and events singled out as trait **D** (*privation*) shows, in its very composition, an absolute absence of causality or motivation. We cannot say that Indra's being fettered (4) is connected causally with his being forsaken by his mother (6), mutilated by his father (7), and forsaken by the gods (9). Likewise, we cannot ask of the whole configuration of the extra-ordinary in **I**, why it is that Indra's killing his father is preceded by, or more exactly, combined with, his being fettered by gods, smitten by his father, and forgotten by his mother?—for, again, it is the *combination* of these extra-ordinary facts

⁵² 'He would have been contained in her for so long anyway' remarked a Tamil informant of mine, 'for his was a divine gestation'. 'Anyway' here is a metaphor for the absolute objectivity of myth.

and events that counts, not their causal inter-connection. The mythological lies in the fact that their combination with each other results neither from the 'inner logic' of these acts and events nor from any inner, psychological factors in the protagonists of the plot, but results entirely from the *absolute objectivity* of configuration itself. That is, we may say that, for example, in **I(3)–(8)**, the fact these six extraordinary events are combined as they are, is mythologically more relevant, or shall we say, is as mythological as the fact of their extraordinariness and the fact of their role as 'plot-forming' factors. The last requires further explanation. Because for Indra, a god, to generate his parents was as important in the sub-plot of his transition from the unmanifest to the manifest as for Indra, a person, to be born with fettered feet and to kill his father. And, as already noted, such a combination of actions and events as 'being fettered', 'being forsaken', 'being smitten', and 'killing the father' certainly configures the plot more than such generally deducible and 'natural' events as 'conception' and 'birth'. However, once built up, the *topos* of configuration loses its semantics, and the mythological there cannot have a meaning, that is, something that is other than itself. Its absolute objectivity is entirely *a-semantic* in the sense that its interpretation will always be in the sphere of another content, another text, and another context, and not within myth itself. Because when such a meaning-carrying interpretation appears in the *topos* of a myth it becomes *a fortiori* an interpretation of its elements—supernatural, extra-ordinary, or natural—and thereby ceases to be semantical too.

§19

The pervasiveness of the 'extra-ordinary'

The extra-ordinary, as a *class of beings*, forms the *typological* aspect of myth, the extra-ordinary, as a *class of actions and events* configuring the plot, forms the *topological* aspect of myth. In both of them, however, the extra-ordinary figures not only as a different class but, far more important, as a *differentiating principle* working through all classes and systems of classifications. And that is why the question, 'what makes a story a myth—is it its own character (or form) or the character of what it is about?'—can be seen as phenomenologically incorrect. Because the mythological here is neither in form nor in content, for myth itself is, in a sort of way, a form of consciousness which realises itself through the content of a text and through the perception of this content. And it is in the third, *modal* aspect of the

mythological that the extra-ordinary shows itself in a most objective and abstract way.

C THE MODAL ASPECT

§20

Triadic phases as a modus

As *unmotivated fact of consciousness*, the mythological reveals itself in the modal aspect as that which would be extra-ordinary by virtue of its ‘un-motivatedness’, and not because it is an extraordinary being, event or configuration of events in a plot.⁵³ The fulfilment or, say, execution of such an unmotivated fact of consciousness can take place in all three aspects of the mythological, which would be, therewith, changed into *three levels of representation* of this fact in the content of a text: the *level of protagonist*, the *level of situation*, and the *level of pattern of manifes-tation*. It is the modal aspect of the mythological where the ‘how’ of the myth finds its consummation. So, in the sense of this aspect, the mythological in **I** is not only that god-manifest Indra divided heaven from earth, generated his parents, and was born as an extra-ordinary divine person and rishi—to ‘return’ at the end of time to his unmanifest state of the primordial non-existence that preceded [in **I(0)**] all the events of his manifest existence. The mythological here is that all this takes place in *three phases*: the phase of the unmanifest [**I(0)**], the phase of the manifest [**I(1)–(14)**] and the phase of the unmanifest which is not the same as that preceding **I(1)–(14)** in **I(0)** *before* the beginning of time, but will be *after* the end of time, though apart from that it *will be* the same. This *three-phasedness* is a *modus* according to which the distribution of events, actions and beings actually takes place and, at the same time, a *universal pattern* [universal in the sense of ‘peculiar to the world of (this) Indra’] which may have existed *as such*, i.e., even without being attributed to things and events, let alone to cosmic or macrocosmic times and spaces. On the contrary, it is time and space which become ‘the time and space of...’ (of a being or of an event) that are attributed to these patterns. However, if we see the mythological

⁵³ L. Wittgenstein (The *Blue Notebooks*, Summer, 1938, L., 1979, p. 27) glimpses the un-motivated in the esthetical *perception*, calling the latter ‘non-causal’.

pattern of 'threefoldness' in the 'unmanifest/mani-fest/again unmanifest', or in the fact that another being killed by Indra was Trīśiras (the three-headed monster, elder brother of Vritra, and also a brahman and rishi), we can see it, just as well, in *our own* classification of beings into supernatural, extraordinary, and natural or, for that matter, in our division of the mythological into its three aspects and three levels.

The difference between *topos* and *configuration* of the second aspect and the *modus* and *pattern* of the third would seem to become rather tenuous were it not for the character of the questioning itself. For indeed, it would be one thing to ask of a plot **I**, or, for that matter, of Indra himself, why for killing your own father should you be *fettered, first, left alone in the wilderness, second, and mutilated, third?* And quite another thing to ask, why for killing your father do you have to suffer *three* privations, not two or four? Then an answer to the first question could be: so it is, for this is a configuration of events, *within* which the events are neither causally linked nor psychologically motivated by each other—the *mythological is the objective in the plot*. An answer to the second could be: this is the way the *whole* configuration is constructed and there can be neither causality and motivation nor non-causality and non-motivation to be accounted for it—the *absolutely objective is the mythological*. The last sentence presents a typical case of *reverse mythological definition* to which I will revert further. The Vedic triad of gods—Indra, Agni, and Soma—can be explained variously in respect of its composition, the diverse ritual functions of these gods, and their origin, but not as a triad *per se*.⁵⁴

§21

The third as a modus

Figuring as a *modus* in the mythological (as in the case of 'the unmanifest/the manifest/the unmanifest') and, at the same time, as a pattern in the description of the mythological (as, for instance, it does in the case of 'the supernatural/the extra-ordinary/the natural', or in the case of 'the transcendental/the supernatural/the natural', etc.) the triad

⁵⁴ *Taittiriya Sanhita*, I (II, 5, 1–3), pp. 188–192. The conjecture of Georges Dumézil [in his *Mythe et épopée* (Paris, 1971, II) and *Le destin de guerrier* (Paris, 1969)] was a brilliant attempt to derive the three-class-ness of Indo-Iranian gods and the vertical triple division of the universe from the three *functions* of gods. But why should the last be *three*?

can be deemed relative to one other modus, namely ‘neither one nor another’. The latter, having the meaning of ‘third-ness’ rather than ‘triad’, figures as tantamount to the extra-ordinary within a mythical situation as well as the basis of many questions and riddles in mythic plots. We see this modus in a description of the three-headed (*Trīśīras*) son of Tvashtar who is (like his brother Vritra) ‘neither a man nor a god’, which is not to say, by any means, that he is ‘half-god half-demon (*asura*)’, though his father is a god, and his mother a demoness. Nor would it be correct to call him, in this context, a brahman, though a brahman in a way he was too. The answer to what he really is would be—a *rishi*.⁵⁵ For this modus, as that of triad, is not motivated by its content: ‘the third’, that which is ‘neither one nor another’ is neither a synthesis of one with another nor something between one and another, but something absolutely other than either of them. *Other-ness* is, in this connection, a mythological idea introduced on the basis of *objectivity* and *non-mental-ness* of myth as the idea of that which cannot be other than it is.⁵⁶

§22

The objectivity of intentionality in myth

It is in its modal aspect that the mythological reveals that it is not a *trope*. This requires further explanation.⁵⁷ L. Wittgenstein would have said about the moduses of the mythological that the fact that they are

⁵⁵ That is, *typologically* ‘the third’ is always either a rishi, or a monster, or both. As a *modus* ‘the third’ equally applies to Trishiras and to Sphinx. Asking, together with Nietzsche, who is Sphinx, we will get the answer that she is neither a man (as Oedipus), nor an animal (as lion), nor a goddess (as Hera who sent her to Thebes), which means she *is* a monster as a manifestation (or variety) of the extra-ordinary. In her case, however, we also have *knowledge* as a *mythological factor*, which is absent in I.

⁵⁶ So, we may say (together with Simon Weightman), that it is the numbers that give the value to events, that make them sacred, not events organizing themselves in numbers. The symbolic numbers have no *referential* meaning, for in principle they refer to the whole world. See Ph. Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, Berkeley, 1991, p. 227.

⁵⁷ *Trope* here is one of the most general notions of aesthetics meaning all, in a text, that is *intentionally* (not necessarily consciously) shaping its content. It may also mean a way of expressing that which can be perceived as other than or different from its possible expressions. In this sense trope is far broader than such notions as metaphor or allegory.

not causal *within* the content of a text should not preclude them from being *motivated* psychologically, aesthetically or otherwise *as a text*—that is, motivated *intentionally*. My stance then, is that it is intentionality itself here that cannot be motivated and, thereby, ought to be thought of as mythological, and not aesthetical or psychological, in its absolute objectivity. Therefore, to say that triads, tetrads, pentads, etc. are related, as *modi* of the mythological, to the ways in which intentionality in text presents itself as a fact of consciousness would be tantamount to saying that it presents itself *as it is*—there can be no difference between the mythological and the way of its presentation. That is why a *modus* or a pattern (numerical or any other) of the mythological is not a trope. Although in the process of a mythological investigation one may find a situation in which it could be said that ‘this trope is mythological’, it could not be said that ‘this myth is a trope’.

§23

The modus of ‘tautological’ substitution (qua) in the structure of the non-existent

In **I(0)** it can be seen with utmost clarity how two *modi*, the numerical pattern of three-foldness and the method of tautological equation, which in any non-mythological context would figure as tropes, do work as a plot-forming mechanism. The mechanism that determines not only ‘how’ in the plot but ‘what’ and ‘who’ too. So, again, it reads:

1(0).0. In the beginning there was the non-existent (*asat*);

- 1 The non-existent was the rishis (*ṛṣi*);
- 2 The rishis were the vital airs (*prāṇa*);
- 3 One of the vital airs was Indra.

To make this even clearer we may paraphrase it saying: in the beginning there was the non-existent which was the rishis who were the vital airs one of which was Indra.⁵⁸ There is no movement in time here, no intervals—‘was’ denotes nothing that would not have been there in the beginning, i.e., *before* the beginning of time. Nothing happens until an *individual* action takes place, which is not to say that there were no actions in **I(0)0–3**. But there were no happenings, for happening as a

⁵⁸ It ought to be stressed here that the sequence 0–3 is purely *textual*, i.e., in the *space* of **I**, and not temporal.

notion implies that there was, or will be, the time when something did not, or will not, happen, and the place where something does not happen. So, what we have here is the actions as such but not the events, the triad of actions non-individually attributed to the ‘tautological triad’ of the non-existent. And it is this, as it were, double modus of the non-existent and its actions that should be considered as the basis of all impending change and variety, of all complexity and evolvement of the non-existent now still at its ‘a-temporal’ inception. Let us, then, transpose the triad of the non-existent into that of a-temporal actions:

0. The non-existent *qua* non-existent—*was* (*āsit*);
 - 1 The non-existent *qua* rishis *qua* vital airs—*desired* (*icchanta*);
 - 2 The rishis *qua* rishis—*mortified* (*riṣ*) themselves with the ascetical practice (*śrama*) and power (*tapas*);
 - 3 A vital air *qua* vital air—*kindled* (*indha*) with its (his, Indra’s) power (*indriya*).

This triad of actions—‘was’ here is a zero-action, a merely formal attribute of that which in the later texts is to become self (*ātman*) with *Being* as its first attribute—directly corresponds to a triad of *modalities*:

0. *Being*, a zero-modality of the non-existent;
 - 1 *Desire* (*icchā*) of the non-existent;
 - 2 *Ascetic Power* (*tapas*) of the rishis;
 - 3 *Organic Power* (*indriya*) of the vital airs.

§24

‘*Qua*’ and ‘*triad*’ as universal *modi* of Indian mythology

Qua becomes one of the universal *modi* of Indian mythology substituting now for time, now for space, and always for *another*, as in **I (0)**—the rishis as a substitute for the non-existent, the vital airs for the rishis, etc. *Triad* is one of the universal *modi* of *quantification*, as in **I (0)** where it quantifies the ‘*qua*’s of the non-existent, and, in doing so, very often changes from ‘three’ to ‘three plus one’, forming thereby a tetrad. These two, very important *modi* of the third aspect of the mythological, form the whole series of triads, each of which represents, in one way or another, a modification of the *primary mythological triad*: ‘*one without another*’, ‘*one as another*’, and ‘*another as one*’. It is this triad that underlies the structure of non-existent in **I(0)** as well as

in very many other mythological contexts, and which is, itself, based on the idea (or a fact of consciousness) of *another* as a *general mythological denominator*. And it is that universal ‘as’, or ‘qua’, as a *modus* of the mythological, which signifies that there, i.e., in the *textual* interval between ‘one’ and ‘another’, denoted by ‘as’, there can be no time. Not even ‘mythological’ time, let alone ‘chronological’ or ‘historical’. Nor even ‘inner time of the plot’.

Nothing but sheer time of the physical (visual, audial, etc.) duration of the text itself and its perception.

If we pass to the Upanishads [quite a few of which are based on **I(0)**] on the one hand, or revert from **I(14–2)** to **I(0)** on the other, we can clearly see how these two *modi* would operate in fixing the series of correspondences analogous to those already established for **I(0)**.⁵⁹ So, for example, the triad, ‘the non-existent, the rishis, the vital airs’, directly corresponds to that of ‘Self (*ātman*), Person (*puruṣa*), Living Being (*bhūta*)’. Or, to be more exact, the former can be seen as a blueprint for the latter. A blueprint, however, not in the sense of *prototype* where ‘proto’ would mean ‘before’, but in the sense of that which is, was, and will be’ even without ever being, or becoming, the latter.

§25

What is mythology?

Thus, if we ask now of plot **I**, ‘are you a myth? (question **B**), and, paraphrasing question **C** add, ‘What is mythological about you?’—the answer, then, will be: Don’t you see, the god Indra is an extra-ordinary person whose comportment is extra-ordinary (the typological aspect); his acts, and the events ascribed to him constitute certain *specific* configuration within the plot (the topological aspect); and he, other persons and beings involved in the plot, as well as their acts, events,

⁵⁹ That is how these *modi* operate in the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upanishad* (the second **Brāhmaṇa** of the first chapter): (0) There was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning: (1) By death, indeed was this covered; (2) or by hunger, for hunger is death; (3) Thinking ‘let me have a self (*ātman*), (4) he created the mind (*manas*). *The Principal Upanishads*, ed., transl. and commented by S. Radhakrishnan, London, 1953, p. 151. As in **I(0)**, creation proper starts with (4). The principal triadic scheme is the same in both texts for, it should be remembered, they belong to the same **Brāhmaṇa**.

circumstances, and all that befell them are given to us *in* and *as* certain specific patterns (the modal aspect).

These three aspects of the mythological, however, are not *absolute* in the sense that a myth as a text, content, and plot can be 'sliced' into three sections, as it were, that exclude each other. On the contrary, each of them, once established, can, in its turn, be observed from the point of view of all of them all over again.

LECTURE THREE

A Myth of Becoming a God

(A meeting with Oedipus)

Which of us is Oedipus here?
Which of us Sphinx?
It is, it seems, a rendezvous
of questions and
question-marks.

F. Nietzsche

1

INTRODUCTION: THE PLOT OF OEDIPUS' STORY

The story of Indra has neither a beginning nor an end for he was born in the timeless transcendental (the non-existent), and as self (*ātman*) he is as endless as he is without beginning. Moreover, even as a person (*puruṣa*) his origin remains lost in the primordial timelessness, and his end awaits him only at the next dissolution of the universe. Being himself a triad of 'self, being (*sattva*), and person' and always existing in the triad of 'the unmanifest, the manifest, and the unmanifest', Indra seems to be a protagonist in a plot which consists, practically, of an infinite number of sub-plots and episodes, for as his universe is in a way a manifestation of himself, whatever happens in the universe can be included into his story. That is why the composition of the plot of his story allows for a considerable degree of arbitrariness; the plot may consist of three episodes or of three thousand—the typological and the topological aspects of his myth are too loosely connected here. Moreover, the versions (or variants) of the plot of Indra's story are not versions, strictly speaking. They do not exclude one another and form together the indefinite whole of one multi-dimensional plot.

The story of Oedipus is finite as regards Oedipus himself. It starts with his birth as a man and future king and ends with his death,

however supernatural *and* extra-ordinary. His life—as a man *and* a person—is finite, though it is framed between the antecedents of his birth leading to circumstances, both human and divine, but other than his own, and the circumstances, also human and divine, of his death and posterior to his death. But however many versions and variants the story of Oedipus may have and into however many plots and sub-plots this story may be segmented, its plot remains, essentially, one and the same. For it remains attributed to one and the same man and person, Oedipus. [The question of ‘oneness’ of a man and a person, in Sophocles’ trilogy and in general, will be addressed at the end of this lecture.]

What follows is an abridged presentation of the story of Oedipus as *one* plot. The subsequent commentary and attempted analysis will be based entirely on this presentation.

II.0.I.I. *Tantalus*, a son of *Zeus* and King of *Sipila*, in order to *test the omniscience of gods* offered them the *roasted body* of his son *Pelops*. The angry gods commanded *Hermes* to revive *Pelops*. For this and other misdeeds *Tantalus* was *severely tortured* in *Hades*.

0.1.2. *Pelops* then came to *Elida* and wooed *Hippodamia*, the daughter of its king *Enomaius*. The last challenged the suitor to a chariot-race which was won by *Pelops* who bribed the king’s charioteer *Mirtilus*, promising to give him half the kingdom and his bride for one night. *Mirtilus* substituted a bronze linchpin in the king’s chariot with a wax one and the king perished. Then *Pelops* pushed *Mirtilus* into the sea from a rock. While falling *Mirtilus* *curled* *Pelops* and his posterity.

0.1.3. *Hephaestus* *purified* *Pelops* from *Mirtilus’* blood and he became the King of *Elida* and was great-grandfather of *Theseus*.

0.2.1. *Kadmus*, a son of the Phoenician King *Agenor*, a grandson of *Poseidon*, and the founder of *Thebes*, *killed a giant dragon* (who devoured his companions), *not knowing* that the latter was a son of the terrible *Ares*. To *expiate* this killing he served *Ares* for eight years. He married *Ares’* daughter and had by her one son and four daughters.

0.2.2. His daughter *Agave* married a Spartan warrior *Echion* who became King of *Thebes* and *obstructed* the ecstatic cult of *Dionysus*. For this *impiety* the god made all Theban women *mad Bacchantes*, and they (including *Echion’s* wife and daughter) *tore to pieces* *Echion’s* son *Pentheus* (and, probably, *Pentheus’* son *Labdacus* too).

0.2.3. *Labdacus’* son *Laius* was invited by *Pelops* to a great feast. *Laius* abducted his son *Chrysippus* to *Thebes* and *raped* him. *Chrysippus* committed *suicide*, and *Pelops* *curled* *Laius* and his posterity, begging *Apollo* and other gods that *Laius* should be killed by his own son.

0.2.4. Laius married Jocasta but their marriage remained childless. He travelled to Delphi whose oracle predicted that his son would kill him.¹

1. When the child was born, Laius told Jocasta to pierce the tendons of its feet and abandon it on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron. She gave the child to her shepherd who, out of pity, entrusted it to a shepherd of Polybus, King of Corinth.

2. Polybus and his wife Meropa being childless adopted the child and called it Oedipus ('with swollen feet').

3. When Oedipus was a young man revelling with his friends, one of them called him 'foundling'. Angrily he asked his parents about his birth, but they persuaded him that he was their legitimate son.

4. Then he went to Delphi and learnt from the oracle that he would kill his father, marry his mother, and have by her most unhappy children. But Phoebus also promised him at the end of his life 'a resting place where he would find his last home among the Awful Goddesses and confer blessing on those who received him and a curse on those who had driven him away'.²

5. To avenge the rape of Chrysippus Hera sent to Thebes a terrible monster Sphinx who killed many a Theban citizen for failing to solve her riddle.

6. Laius travelled to Delphi to ask Apollo how to save his city from the Sphinx.

7. On his way from Delphi, at the intersection of three roads, Oedipus met an old man in a cart with a herald and three servants. The herald threatened him with a whip, Oedipus hit him with his staff, whereupon the old man beat Oedipus with a stick. Then Oedipus killed all of them save one servant who slipped away.

8. Oedipus, then, went to Thebes, solved the riddle of the Sphinx, made her kill herself (or killed her, according to another version), married the widow of Laius, and became the king. He and Jocasta had two sons and two daughters.

¹ OK, 710–715. Here I used the text: Sophocles. *The Plays and Fragments*, trans. and commentary by R.C.Jebb Part I, the Oedipus Tyrannus (OK), Cambridge University Press, 1893; Part II, the Oedipus Colonus (OC), 1900. Part III, the Antigone (A), 1900. I also used the translation: Sophocles. *Oedipus the King* (trans. by D.Grene); *Oedipus at Colonus* (trans. by R.Fitzgerald); *Antigone* (trans. by E.Wyekoff), with an introduction by D.Grene, The University of Chicago Press, 1954.

² OK, 85–90.

9. After twenty years of happy life *a deadly pestilence was sent* on Thebes. [A ‘blight on the fields, and a blight on the women to whom no children are born.’]³

10. The Priest of Zeus at the head of a crowd of children and old men implores Oedipus to save Thebes from the pestilence *brought on them by Ares*.⁴

11. Oedipus’ brother-in-law, Creon, sent by him to the *Pyth-ian Temple* of Apollo, returns and announces that Phoebus commanded them to *drive out a pollution* caused by the *unavenged* murder of Laius.⁵

12. The chorus prays to Phoebus, Athene, Artemis, Zeus and Dionysus to help them to fight Ares.⁶

13. Oedipus calling himself ‘a *stranger (xenos)* to the story and stranger to the deed’, *invokes*, in the name of Apollo, his *curse* on the killer of Laius, and outlaws him.

14. He sends for *Teiresias*, the blind prophet, who *refuses to speak* for the reason that ‘it will be better for both of us to bear our several

³ *OK*, 25–30. Here we are leaving the ground of a ‘generalized’ version of the legend of Oedipus, whose sources stretch from 8th c. B.C. to 3rd c. A.D. From now on we find ourselves at the mercy of Sophocles’ trilogy alone whose version is probably based on versions current in or before 5th c. B.C. only. (The change of source is marked in the summary by a shift to the present tense.) This necessarily entails a certain change in our presentation of the plot. So, for example, while in 5 above the sending of the Sphinx by Hera and the devastation caused by her in Thebes are presented as one event, the sending of pestilence by Apollo is presented as two events. For, in the plot of *OK* there comes first the event of pestilence itself (9), and only two moves further on (11) do we learn about who sent it and why. This must be so, because the *factor* of a protagonist’s knowledge of an event becomes, itself, a separate event.

⁴ *OK*, 26–27, 191. 215. Ares is referred to as ‘a savage god that burns us’, as ‘war god’, and as ‘a god unhonoured among the gods’.

⁵ *OK*, 127–130. Thus as the Sphinx was a punishment for the unavenged rape of Chrysippus by Laius, so a pestilence was a punishment for the killing of Laius. An interesting point here is that Creon accounts for the neglect of the Thebans in finding the culprit by their preoccupation with the Sphinx.

⁶ *OK*, 160–165. The first three of them are addressed as ‘three helpers against death’ which is extremely interesting, for if we take this passage literally we would have to understand fate (not named here) as *the curse or curses* in the fulfilment of which Ares (as the Sphinx before him) was *instrumental*. At the same time Apollo is asked to interfere with his own deed revealed through his oracle.

destinies to the end'.⁷ He refuses to reveal the murderer, saying "all of you here *know nothing*... Did you not *understand before* or would you provoke me into speaking?"⁸

15. Finally, Teiresias reveals the truth ['I say that with those you love best you live in foulest shame *unknowingly*... It is *not fate* that I should be your ruin, Apollo is enough; it is his care to work this out'].⁹

16. Oedipus rejects his accusations, saying that Teiresias was unable 'by prophecy from birds nor otherwise from any god to glean a word of *knowledge* to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, but I came, *Oedipus*, who *knew nothing*...and solved it by my wit alone'.¹⁰

17. He accuses Creon and Teiresias of treason, but the latter responds that he 'is no slave of Oedipus, but of *Loxias*',¹¹ *calls* Oedipus '*blind*', and *predicts* his blindness, exile, and utter humili-ation.¹² He says that Oedipus '*in name is a stranger* among Theb-ans, but soon will be shown to be one of them and shall be proved father and brother to his children...and to his mother a son and husband both, a fellow sower in the bed of his father whom he murdered.'¹³

⁷ OK, 320–321.

⁸ OK, 328, 359.

⁹ OK, 366–367, 376.

¹⁰ OK, 385–397.

¹¹ OK, 410–411. Loxias, 'twisted', 'ambiguous', an epithet of Apollo as the god of oracles. Teiresias' prophetic gift and profession is to *know*, *understand*, and, if need be, convey the meaning of the *words* of Apollo whose slave he is.

¹² OK, 415–419: 'You have your eyes but *see not* where you are in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you live with. Do you know who your parents are? *Unknowingly*, you are an enemy to kith and kin in death beneath the earth, and in this life. A deadly footed, double striking curse, from father and mother both, shall drive you forth out of this land, with darkness on your eyes.'

¹³ OK, 451–460.

18. Jocasta reveals that a *previous oracle* had said to Laius that he would be killed by his son, but as he was killed ‘by a *foreign* highway robber’,¹⁴ it seems that the oracles of Apollo do not come true, for ‘god’s service perishes’.¹⁵

19. A messenger from Corinth announces that old Polybus has died and that Oedipus will be chosen as their king. He also reveals that Oedipus had been adopted by Polybus and Meropa, and that he himself was the shepherd who took him from the hands of a shepherd from Thebes who had been commanded to leave the child with *pierced ankles and fettered feet* on Cithaeron’s slopes.

20. Oedipus sends for that Theban shepherd who confirms the fact, from which follows that Oedipus *is* guilty of parricide and incest.¹⁶

21. Jocasta hangs herself in her bedroom.

22. Oedipus blinds himself.¹⁷

23. When the chorus reproaches him for this, he says: ‘It was Apollo, friends, Apollo that brought my sorrows to completion. But the hand that struck was mine.’¹⁸

24. When Oedipus beseeches Creon to expel him from Thebes lest there should be pollution, the latter replies that the *Delphic oracle* ought to be consulted. After some time he is, finally, exiled, and starts his twenty year long period as a wandering beggar, accompanied by his *daughter Antigone*. His sons do not object to his exile for they desire to rule the city themselves, though Creon has remained its regent.¹⁹

¹⁴ *OK*, 710–721.

¹⁵ *OK*, 905–910. Later (977–983) follows her famous invective against oracles and dreams: ‘why should man fear if *chance* (or fortune, *tyche*) is all in all for him, and he has *fore-knowledge of nothing*? Best to live lightly as one can, *unthinkingly*. As to your mother’s bed—don’t fear it. Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, many a man has lain with his own mother. But he to whom such things are nothing bears his life most easily.’

¹⁶ *OK*, 1071–1072.

¹⁷ *OK*, 1270.

¹⁸ *OK*, 1329–1331.

¹⁹ R.C. Jebb, II, p. ix. We are passing now to *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*). There is no suggestion either in *OK* or in *OC* that the oracle was consulted. The circumstances of Oedipus’ banishment from Thebes are dim and contradictory in the extreme, particularly as regards the role played by his sons in this case.

25. Oedipus' son *Polineices* is driven out of Thebes by his younger brother *Eteocles*. Polineices marries the daughter of *Adrastus*, King of Argos, and begins to muster a great host against Thebes.

26. The Thebans receive a *new oracle* that their welfare depends on Oedipus, in life and death.

27. Oedipus arrives with Antigone at a spot near Athens *sacred to Eumenides* and *recognizes* in it his last shelter that Phoebus of Delphi had promised to him. He utters his prayer to the Eumenides: 'Hear, sweet children of primeval darkness! Hear me, Athens, pity this poor wraith of Oedipus!'

28. He asks the local citizens to grant him a sanctuary on the sacred grounds, saying: 'I have come to you *sacred* and pious, and bringing benefit to you'.²⁰ He asks them to bring to him their King Theseus.

29. Oedipus' daughter, Ismene, comes from Thebes with tid-ings about the strife between his sons, and about the new oracle. Now Oedipus is fully aware of his power and of the significance of *the place of his burial*. He knows that the Thebans would desire to have him while he is still alive but not on their soil, for his father's blood being on him would forbid it, but if his burial were unholy that would be a curse to them;²¹ so that on his death they might secure the *guardianship of his grave*.²²

30. The chorus advises Oedipus to make an *expiatory ritual to the Eumenides* whose grounds he violated and explains in detail how to perform it. Ismene goes to the grove to perform it instead of her father.

31. Theseus comes from Athens. Oedipus beseeches the king to protect him in Attica and to allow him to be buried near the grove of the Eumenides when he is dead,²³ for which he *pledges in the name of Zeus and Phoebus* to bestow on him and Athens his blessing which, after his demise, will be decisive in their future struggle with Thebes. Theseus publicly adopts Oedipus as his citizen, and leaves the grove to perform a sacrifice at the neighbouring altar of Poseidon.²⁴

²⁰ OC, 286–289. 'Sacred' (*hieros*) may mean here that he possessed the *sacred power* given to him by Apollo and the Eumenides.

²¹ OC, 402. 22 R.C.Jebb, II, p. xi.

²³ He says (OC, 621–623): 'Then my slumbering buried corpse, cold in death... shall drink their blood if Zeus is Zeus, and Phoebus' word is true.'

²⁴ R.C.Jebb, II, pp. xv, xvii.

32. Creon with his guards appears. Unknown to Oedipus he had taken Ismene as a hostage, and now tries to persuade Oedipus to return with him to Thebes. He calls Oedipus 'a *stranger* everywhere, never at rest.'²⁵ Oedipus *puts a curse* on Thebes, and refers to Phoebus and Zeus who *communicated to him the knowledge* of the future of Thebes.²⁶

33. When Creon's guards take Antigone away from him Oedipus *utters his curse* to Creon: 'To thee and thy line may the Sun-God grant such life in old age as I have had!'²⁷

34. Theseus interrupts his sacrifice to Poseidon, comes to the grove, frees both maidens, and sends Creon and his men back to Thebes.

35. When the army of Polineices and his Argive allies gather before the walls and towers of Thebes it becomes known that victory will be with the side for which Oedipus declares. Polineices comes to Attica and prays at the altar of Poseidon together with Theseus, but as a *stranger*, not yet revealing his name.

36. The chorus recites the *Ode of Death* ('Not to be born surpasses thought and speech. The second best is to have seen the light and then go back quickly whence we came... And the worst lot is to outlive the joys of life...').²⁸

37. Antigone recognizes Polineices in the approaching *stranger*. He implores Oedipus, *in the name of Poseidon*, to take his side. But Oedipus *places his curse* on both sons ('You shall die by your brother's hand and...he will die by yours...').²⁹ Doomed by his father and his Erynies, Polineices implores his sisters to give him *funeral rites* when he is dead, and goes forth to the siege of Thebes.

38. The chorus: '...new ills have newly come from the sightless *stranger*...the heavy ills, unless, perchance, *fate (moira)* finds its goal!'³⁰ A terrific peal of thunder is heard. Oedipus implores the chorus to send for Theseus. Thunder and lightning again, chorus urges Theseus who '*makes pure offering at the altar of Poseidon*', to hurry and receive a *blessing* from 'this *stranger*'.³¹

²⁵ *OC*, 745.

²⁶ *OC*, 791–799.

²⁷ *OC*, 868–870.

²⁸ *OC*, 1225–1230.

²⁹ *OC*, 1388–1389.

³⁰ *OC*, 1450.

³¹ *OC*, 1496.

39. Oedipus promises Theseus to *disclose the future* of Athens, which Theseus must hand down to his son, and he in his turn to his heir, and so forever...so that Athens shall be safe from the Thebans, the dragon's sons!³² 'The gods attend to those who put off god and turn to frenzy (*mainesthai*).'³³ Driven by an urge from god (*theos*), Oedipus asks Theseus to follow him to his *hidden sacred tomb (hieros tumbos)*,³⁴ to which the *guide (pompos)*, *Hermes* and the *goddess of the dead* will lead him.³⁵

40. The chorus prays to the *Unseen Goddess* and the *Lord of nocturnal spirits, Aidonius*, that they may let the *stranger* pass quietly to the *fields of the dead*, because he is so weary of his great sufferings.

41. When his daughters help him to *bathe, dress, and make libations for the dead*, the earth groans, and a call comes from the god: 'Oedipus, Oedipus! Why are we waiting?' He dismisses his daughters, remains with Theseus for a short time, and ceases to be seen so that 'in what manner he perished no one mortal man could tell but Theseus'.³⁶ Antigone says that 'some thing *invisible and strange* caught him up-or-down into a space unseen',³⁷ and adds that 'he lived his life as he wished',³⁸ and it is he himself who chose to die among *strangers* in a *strange land*.³⁹

42. When a terrible debacle is wrought on the Argive army of the seven allies and both sons of Oedipus are killed by each other, Creon issues a decree denying funeral rites to Polineices whose corpse is left to rot and be fed to the birds of carrion, and two guards are ordered to guard the place.⁴⁰

³² OC, 1531–1532.

³³ OC, 1536–1537.

³⁴ OC, 1545.

³⁵ OC, 1548.

³⁶ OC, 1655–1666.

³⁷ OC, 1681–1683.

³⁸ OC, 1704–1705.

³⁹ OC, 1705, 1712. This statement can be seen as contradicting the concluding statement of the chorus in OK, 1529–1530, but about this further.

⁴⁰ This is the beginning of *Antigone (A)*.

43. Antigone decides to bury Polineices. One of the guards comes to Creon with the news that someone unknown 'left the corpse just now, burial all accomplished, thirsty dust strewn on the flesh, the ritual complete'.⁴¹ Creon, enraged, sends him back to undo the ritual and catch the culprit. The guard '...strips the rotten body back to its slimy nakedness...' and drags Antigone to Creon.⁴²

44. The chorus recites the famous *Ode to Man* ('Wonders are many, but nothing is more wondrous than man...').⁴³

45. On Creon's orders Antigone is immured in a sepulchral chamber in one of the rock-tombs where she is to be left 'with just so much to eat as to avoid pollution to the city by infliction of death by starvation'.⁴⁴ As she moans to the chorus that 'Acheron is her mate...and she is going *alive* to the place of corpses, a *stranger* still, never at home with the living nor with the dead',⁴⁵ Creon insists that in her '*buried life*...no stain upon us in this case'.⁴⁶

46. The blind Teiresias announces to Creon that all *augury through birds* has failed. Nor can burnt sacrifices be made for *Hephaestus* showed no flame upon the altar. All the altars are choked and tainted by birds and dogs with leavings from the unburied corpse of Polineices, and the gods no longer accept from the Thebans prayer, or offering, or the flame of meat-altars. He urges Creon to 'yield to the dead, and not to kill them a second time'. Creon refuses, saying that 'no mortal can defile the gods'.⁴⁷ Teiresias accuses him of thrusting to the *grave (taphos)* a *soul (psyche)* belonging to the *upper world* while leaving in the upper world a corpse unburied and unhallowed, *confusing*, thereby, the upper and lower worlds, depriving the *nethergods* of their share, and insulting the gods above. He threatens Creon that the Erynies of Hades and those of the gods above will avenge his crime, and *predicts* that 'before the sunset he will exchange the corpse of his son for these corpses'.⁴⁸

47. Creon runs to free Antigone and to bury Polineices.

⁴¹ A, 248–250.

⁴² A, 409–410.

⁴³ A, 332–364.

⁴⁴ A, 775.⁴⁵ A, 812, 850–851.

⁴⁶ A, 889–890.

⁴⁷ A, 1030–1044.

⁴⁸ A, 1064–1072.

48. The chorus prays to *Dionysus (Bacchus)*, son of Zeus and Cadmus' daughter Semele, to 'come...and heal the great disease of Thebes...'.⁴⁹

49. But, too late, for Antigone hangs herself in her tomb, her betrothed, Creon's son *Haemon*, kills himself with a sword, and Creon's wife, Eurydice, dies by the sword before the altar.

50. The Chorus says that no mortal can escape his destined woe.

⁴⁹ A, 1118–1151.

2

THE EXTRA-ORDINARY, THE STRANGE, AND THE UNIQUE

§1

The 'extra-ordinary' as a 'shifter' between the natural and supernatural

To Oedipus a curse would be seen as both extra-ordinary and supernatural. Extra-ordinary as an *exceptional* human action of cursing or being cursed, and supernatural because a god or a deity is appealed to as a perpetrator of the curse and as a guarantor of its fulfilment. Although for the god involved it would be quite a 'normal' supernatural act or fact.

Unlike Indra whose birth was extra-ordinary within the supernatural, Oedipus was born in the natural way. Although like Indra he was mutilated and fettered, and for the same reason—to prevent him from killing his father—in his case it was extraordinary within the natural, while in Indra's it was, again, extraordinary within the supernatural. The same could be said of their parricide. [In both cases their mothers acted as accomplices to the attempted murder of their children, and their acting thus can be classified as extra-ordinary within the natural.]

Oedipus' death, however, was both extra-ordinary *and* supernatural, while the death of Polineices and Antigone was extraordinary *within* the natural.

§2

Strangeness and personhood

Oedipus' *strangeness* is a personal characteristic, i.e., it derives from the notion of person. Not only in the sense that in a strange man we are dealing with a person, but also in the sense that when we call someone strange, 'person-ness' is already assumed to exist as a class of men

which is about to be classified into ‘strange’ and ‘familiar’. Moreover, there is something strange about the very notion of person so that strangeness is already given as a characteristic *common* to all of us; only in some of us it is actual, in some others potential, in some of us it is dominant, in some others hardly noticeable, etc. So, if ‘extra-ordinary’, in this context, is a term of description, ‘strange’, though used as a term of description too, figures as *that which is described*. In other words, here we describe the ‘strangeness’ of those who *call each other* or themselves strange.

§3.

*The strange as conscious of its own strangeness;
hence always to some extent subjective*

Of course, phenomenologically, strangeness can be derived from or reduced to the four traits of the extra-ordinary as they were described with respect to Indra (Lecture Two, [Section 3](#), §10). However, strangeness differs from the extra-ordinary in that not only is the observer conscious of the protagonist being ‘other than the others’, but the protagonist himself is conscious of his own ‘otherness’. Moreover, not only is the latter aware that he is ‘other than the others’ but also of his being, as it were, ‘other than himself’. This clearly brings us from the realm of the ‘objectivity’ of the extra-ordinary to the domain of self-consciousness which cannot be made entirely objective; there will always be left some ‘residuum’ of the psychological there irreducible to objectively describable facts and factors.

§4

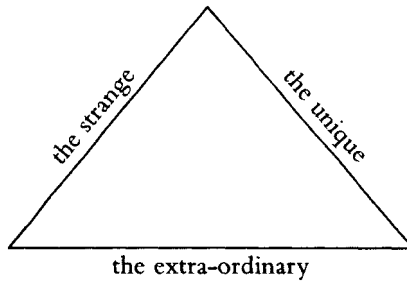
Introduction of the category of the unique

It is in juxtaposition to strangeness on the one hand, and the extra-ordinary, on the other, that one other category can be introduced, that of the *unique*, completing thereby, the ‘triangle of otherness’:

§5

*The unique as not necessarily conscious of its own
uniqueness; hence always to some extent objective*

If the uniqueness of Indra can be objectively deduced from the uniqueness of his *place* in the Vedic pantheon (to be, later on, ‘diluted’



in the idea of *Indras* as a sub-class of *devas* and, still later, totally annulled metaphysically in the ‘karmic’ infinitude of number of *Indras* in the *Puranas*), the god himself was not aware of the *objective* nature of his subjective (i.e., psychological) states and modalities. Oedipus, on the contrary, while considering himself the unhappiest and the most suffering of men, was fully aware that it was his unhappiness and sufferings which would bring him to an extra-ordinary and supernatural end and posthumously elevate him to the rank of supernatural beings. He was not, however, as yet aware of his otherness as coming within the category of the unique, though his sacredness when he was still alive, and his impending ‘deification’ might have made this possible. For he *knew* himself to be *an other* and behaved, in the Grove of Eumenides, accordingly.

Uniqueness here is an element of transcendental subjectivity and a feature not only of one’s perception or self-perception but also of a certain *apperception* of the content of text. And, contrary to strangeness, in the analysis of uniqueness there will always be some element of the objective irreducible to the psychological.

3

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT PLOTS

§1

*Analysis of plot, from the perspective of its author,
into that which is represented (‘what’ is to be said)
and the mode of its realization in the text
(‘how’ to say it)*

Now another digression about plot. We have looked at plot in Lecture Two as a representation of the content of text, and discussed the

differences between the plot of Indra's life and the plot of Sophocles' trilogy. This time, however, plot is considered not in its connection with and reduction to content and text but as a phenomenon in its own right, a *datum* of consciousness, conventionally presented here as independent from and irreducible to other *data* of consciousness though, at the same time, possessing its own complexity of composition and variety of ways of its generation and *apperception*. The last is particularly important, for one not only presents (creates, or more exactly recreates) *something* as plot, but does it while already knowing that there is something, i.e., a certain thing which is to be presented as or in a plot and that a plot is another thing *specifically intended* to represent the first. In other words, apperception here presupposes that an *idea* of plot has already been formed and what one does while generating or perceiving a plot is a realization, active or passive of this idea.⁵⁰

§2

*I First case (the 'absolutely objective'): the narrator
bears witness to an already existing reality from
which his version is in intention indistinguishable
(fusion of 'what' and 'how')*

But there are plots and plots. Their differences, however conjectural, I would reduce to three basic cases. The first case is when a plot is thought of as an entirely *objective thing*, that is, an event or a series or sequence of events regarded as 'having been there'—no matter whether in reality, or memory, or already in narration—and as that which is intended to be narrated, as it were, again. Again, let me reiterate, irrespective of whether it is a not yet narrated event itself or a tale already told of that event—both would be equally objective in relation to the plot which is being told. The narrator, then, would be aware of himself as a mere executor or witness, and of his version as not his but that which is one with and the only possible realization of, the *reality* of

⁵⁰ Although, of course, realization here does not necessarily presuppose one's *reflexion* on it. What is necessarily presupposed is that apperception, in distinction from perception, is non-individual (i.e., cultural, ethno-cultural, etc.) by definition and therewith, exempt from the domain of psychology.

his plot, of which he is subjectively aware. [This is an ‘ideal’ case when ‘authorship’ in *our* sense of the word does not apply.]⁵¹ As for its *inner* composition, the plot, in this case, does not know the difference between ‘what has happened’ and ‘what is thought of what has happened, is happening, or will have happened’. In other words, the classification of actions, *in* a plot, into ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ is irrelevant: they are neither this nor that, whereby a ‘triple’ classification might be suggested, that is, into the ‘objective’, the ‘subjective’, and the ‘absolutely objective’.⁵² It is this absolute objectivity that, inseparable from what denotes it in the plot as well as from what is known of it both within the plot and ‘outside’ it, as, say, by the narrator, that distinguishes what we have called the plots of the first case. And it is the mythological that *is* this absolute objectivity. So that no *meta-position* is possible here, and if it were it would be, itself, mythological, as in the cases when one myth is interpreted in the sense of another. Indra in I cannot extend his knowledge of himself and the universe beyond the *myth* of Indra and his universe, and when he does (as in plot VII), it is the knowledge of Vishnu and his universe communicated to Indra by Vishnu.⁵³

⁵¹ This, of course, is a mere speculation, for I am substituting myself for the teller of a story and deducing his conjectural position, in relation to his plot, from mine. Because, strictly speaking, his awareness will be *one* with what he is aware of.

⁵² There can be no ‘absolutely subjective’ under the hypothesis, for the direction of interpretation is one way—you cannot interpret the objective in the sense of the subjective, only the other way round.

⁵³ We cannot even be sure, as was mentioned in Lecture Two, that Indra in **1.4–14** *knew* (or *remembered*) himself as Indra in **I.1–3**, not to speak of Indra in **I.0**. But about this further, in Lecture Five (plot VII).

§3.

If Second case (the 'objective'): the narrator differentiates the myth ('what') from his treatment of it in the plot of the tragedy ('how'), thereby separating his own thinking from the objectivity of myth

The second case is when 'to tell this story' and 'how to tell it' have become two different intentions, which, however, is not to say that what we have called the 'absolutely objective' or the 'mythological' would be concentrated in 'this story' as such and absent in 'how'.⁵⁴ I suggest that in this case it is the author's or narrator's *subjectivity* that makes him think of this division as objective while from the point of view of the investigator of myth here, 'how', however individual, may be mythologically interpreted as, for instance, how Sophocles treated a variant of Oedipus' myth, which he had chosen for the plot of his trilogy and of which he was definitely aware as but one of the variants. He was also aware that this variant might have been treated differently by another playwright, and that his treatment of it was individual. And, lastly, he knew that the plot of the story was a myth (*muthos*); he did not know 'what is myth' in our sense of the word though he knew perfectly well what *muthos* was, as myth *and* plot, in *his* sense of the word. His was an awareness of myth not only as a tale of what happens to whom (i.e., to those who are either much better or much worse than 'most of us') but also as a plot in a tragedy. Or, more important, of a plot in a tragedy as necessarily a myth, and again, his was an intention to re-create the myth in the plot of tragedy, which necessarily entails his position, as it were, already as one of *genre* and, therewith, outside the myth, for myth itself knows no *genre*. This enables him to interpret (through the protagonists and chorus) the myth as the plot, and the plot as that which is *innerly* determined by certain factors (such, for instance, as fate, human nature, participation and interference of gods) as well as by the laws and rules of the *genre* of tragedy. In other words, myth starts to be understood as something else (not the other way round), on the one hand, and its re-creator starts to understand himself as something other than myth, on the other. Myth, by this token, becomes more and more objective in the sense that *one becomes less and less*

⁵⁴ Needless to say, myth itself does not know of such a division or, more exactly, the reality of myth knows not of anything that is not itself.

aware subjectively of its absolute objectivity. This, however, needs explaining.

§4

'Thoughts without a thinker'—W.R.Bion

The idea of absolute objectivity, in the context of our mythological deliberations, presupposes, that there is something, both in terms of 'what' and 'how', that exists irrespective of whether it is or is not known to the protagonist in a plot, to its narrator (or 'author'), or to me, its investigator. To give an example, the objectivity of curse, Apollo, and fate (or, rather, of curse, Apollo, and fate as that which brings about the results of their connection) determines the plot of the trilogy, Teiresias' knowledge and Oedipus' ignorance of it notwithstanding (in Teiresias' words, 'Apollo is enough!'). At the same time, that very objectivity of curse, Apollo, and fate, while predetermining the plot, also predetermines the knowledge and ignorance of its protagonists as *factors* in the plot; the factors which assume their objectivity in relation to other events and circumstances.⁵⁵

§5

*Tendency arising from the separation of 'objective'
& 'subjective' in II to present the 'objective' as
outside subjectivity, unknown and unknowable*

All this results, in plots of the second kind, in that when the knowledge of the absolute objectivity is communicated and received, it is very *vague, ambiguous*, and takes a lot of understanding and interpreting, on the one hand.⁵⁶ On the other hand, however, it results in the idea, itself

⁵⁵ That is, they assume their *relative*, not absolute objectivity. Although, of course, knowledge can, in some other mythological contexts, figure not only as a plot-generating factor but as absolute objectivity itself.

⁵⁶ So, of course, it is *intended* to be, again *objectively*; it is not without reason that the source of such knowledge, Apollo, was called *loxias*, 'vague', 'ambivalent'.

very mythological too, of the fundamental *unknowability* of that objectivity in the sense that, as it were, ‘the more it is known subjectively, the less objective it is’.⁵⁷ It is in this case that a situation of tension arises between the known and unknown and between the less known and more known, without which no real plot would be possible at all; a situation which arises not only within a given plot, i.e., between its protagonists, but also between the plot and its author or narrator or, even, between the plot and its investigator. The difference between what there is and the knowledge of what there is, totally absent in I (the first case of plot), assumes in II an almost ontological significance and, even allowing for merely esthetical means and tropes employed by Sophocles to satisfy contemporary requirements of the *genre* of tragedy, one can see how a new factor—that of reflexion and self-reflexion starts creeping into the plot of Oedipus’ story, paving the way for the appearance of new *objects of knowledge* in the form of *mental states*, such as suffering, pain, etc., which had hitherto existed as mere actions or events. And, indeed, both Indra and Oedipus complain of their sufferings, practically the same in both cases, but only the latter reflected upon them (and upon himself enduring them) as something other than the actions or events that caused them. We can clearly see that, if Indra’s sufferings and privations *objectively* coincide with the practice of severe asceticism (*tapas*), and put him into the class of divine ascetics (*rishis*), the sufferings of Oedipus made him, both objectively *and* subjectively, the most suffering person in the whole country and the man endowed with supernatural powers before his death, and a kind of fully fledged supernatural being (a local deity) thereafter. But, to reiterate what was said above on this point, it is in this, second case of plot that a tendency appears, both within and

⁵⁷ The extreme (or rather ‘degenerate’) case of mythology based on this principle can be seen in ideological constructions based on the idea that, ‘the real (or actual) state of affairs exists only till it is known, for its complete knowledge abolishes it’. By this ‘reverse’ (or ‘negative’) determinism almost all modern ideologies, and first of all Hegelianism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, are marked. See sections 5 and 6 in Lecture One.

outside the plot, to present the objective as the unknown and, therewith, to regard the hidden, secret, or ambiguous as symptoms of its objectivity.⁵⁸

§6

Tendency in II to replicate within the plot the distinction between 'event' and 'awareness of the event', moving from the objectively given (cf. Indra) to its subjective realization (cf. Oedipus)

And this, in its turn, leads us to another observation concerning the second variety of plot. However great the sufferings, privations,

⁵⁸ We have three, at least, mythological constructions of plot—whether of the story of an individual being, or family, or tribe, or humankind, or the whole universe—based on that principle: (1) the first is when the absolute objectivity (of Idea, in Hegel, of means and relations of production, in Marx, of instinctual drives in Freud, of evolutionary forces of species-generation in Darwin) finds its 'natural' opposition in and enters into complementary relations with, its knowledge. The knowledge that is, itself, always transparent, while the objectivity behind it always *opaque*. But once known (as in Hegel and Marx alike), when the logic of knowledge coincides with the laws (also logical) of history, that objectivity ceases to exist as different from the subjectivity of its knowledge, the tension between them is resolved, the opaque objectivity becomes transparent, the play is over, the neurotic patient 'cured', mankind hitherto torn apart by 'inner contradictions' ends the plot of its history, and we (or they) are entering (or even have already entered) on the stage of an entirely new, hitherto unseen and unheard of, scene, to play our role-less roles in a final play without a plot, once and for all. (2) The second, when there are two or more absolute objectivities *co-existing* with each other in their respective plots, and one's knowledge of one of them and its eventual abolition results in one (say, the protagonist) shifting to another plot, not yet played, another role not yet acted out, and another knowledge of another objectivity. This is very typical of some ancient and early medieval Indian, and particularly Buddhist, plots, and also of some gnostical and gnostically-inspired plots. In this case, in principle at least, all things known are transparent and so is that which lies behind them, though at a given time and in a given situation, their relation remains mutually negative and complementary. (3) And, finally, the third is when there are two or more objectivities existing, as it were, behind each other within the macrocosmos of the same plot. Then the knowledge, and eventual dismissal of one of them would lead one (the protagonist or the narrator) to another, and so on. The plot here very often instead of evolving to the end of a story, or history, moves back, as it were, to its source which is one with the absolute objectivity that remains undismissible, because it is unknowable by definition—and this is what such a plot usually claims.

transgressions, and ambiguities of Indra may have been, and however fully they qualify him for his position of an *extra-ordinary being* (as a god and a person alike) in the sense of the extra-ordinary taken in its typological aspect, you cannot call him a ‘uniquely’ extra-ordinary or, for that matter, ‘uniquely’ suffering person. And this is so for two reasons. The first is that his being, as it were, a member of the class of extra-ordinary beings, the class of supernatural beings, and, later on, the sub-sub-class of Indras, *outweighs* his uniqueness as a person. Typology still prevails over individuality here objectively (i.e., from the point of view of narrator, commentator, and, even, investigator of myth). The second is that, subjectively, we do not find Indra reflecting on his sufferings as that which, in his own life, makes him a unique person or god. His awareness of the uniqueness of his position among gods is based on the objective fact of his objectively ‘élitist’ position, and not on the fact of his suffering and extra-ordinary ability of bearing it; whereas Oedipus is, or rather becomes (in *OC*) aware of his uniqueness *because* of his suffering, and not only by virtue of his fate objectively determined and executed through the plot. Although, of course, the fact that he was ‘the most suffering man’ cannot but reflect his very lofty and élitist position among mortals and, teleologically, even loftier one in his post-mortal existence. In the case of Oedipus, his individual uniqueness and his objectively given status find themselves in a sort of dynamic equilibrium. One’s uniqueness here is an element of transcendental subjectivity, for it figures not only as a feature in the *apperception* of the plot of the trilogy and of plot in general, at that time, but also as a feature of one’s merely subjective *perception* of them.⁵⁹ The ‘otherness’ of Oedipus is, in the intentionality of the trilogy, balanced, or rather ‘mitigated’ by a merely psychological conviction (both in Sophocles and Aristotle), that ‘we indeed, know that such things happen to us too’.

⁵⁹ In fact, it is *apperception* of myth (*muthos*) that Aristotle describes in the *Poetics* as his perception of plot, not yet clearly aware that the latter was, itself, mythic and, therewith, objective.

§7

III Third case (the 'subjective'): the narrator regards the plot as his own creation, the product of his mentality, of his 'psychological' subjectivity

The third case is when a plot is regarded as an entirely *subjective thing*, and it would, then, be left for its investigator, and not for its author, protagonists, and audience (or reader), to find, or rather to re-establish its objectivity. Or, in other words and in connection with what was said about the second case, the objectivity of the plot here reaches its apogee because it is entirely ignored, and its being ignored subjectively, gives it, as it were, free rein within the intentionality of the plot. For this intentionality is that of the author who creates (so he thinks) his own 'psychological' subjectivity in *the other*, not knowing that it is 'the other-ness' of the mythological that *re-creates* its objectivity in him and does it through his reflexive thinking—in appearance the least objective and the most psychological thing in the world, but in fact as mythological as any of its mythological objects.

§8

The mythological as objectively present in our own mentality; 'myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact'—C.Lévi-Strauss

Therefore, if in the first case of plot there is no differentiation, subjectively, into myth and non-myth, and in the second the myth can be seen as both objectivity *and* convention of *genre*, it is in the third that it is ignored even as that 'which may happen to me too', and leaves me (the author of a novel, the mythologist, or, for that matter, the founder of psychoanalysis) *objectively* confronted with its absolute 'otherness' which appears to me in the guise of my own subjectivity. So, in saying that both Oedipus and Indra exemplify what 'in fact' is in me as well as in all of us, i.e., innate phylogenetic tendencies, I am ignoring the fact that they belong to a class of beings (let us call them 'exemplifiers' for convention's sake) other than mine, on the one hand, and the fact that those very tendencies exemplified by them and 'discovered' by me, as well as my 'discovery' of them, are, themselves, derived from a mythology underlying them, and not the other way round, on the other.

§9

*Double nature of knowledge in III: the self-knowledge
of the author/protagonist at once masking and
exposing the underlying knowledge of the plot taken as
a whole*

Intentionality in the third case of plot is too transparent not to see behind it the opacity of the myth which can be 'demythologized' only at the cost of debunking mythology and its investigator alike. Nietzsche's question in the epigraph to this lecture can be applied to Sophocles and to the mythologist, just as well; and the last would have to answer as best he can, if he sets out to investigate this kind of plot. For it is the *uniqueness* of plot, that reveals itself objectively through reflexive thinking though, of course, the author himself does not explicate this uniqueness *as* objective. On the contrary, he endows it with all the properties that he considers utterly subjective—or, sometimes merely *conventional* in his view—properties ascribed by him to his own unique 'I' and projected into the 'objectivity' of plot as his and nobody else's. But it is in doing exactly this that he provides a space for the free play of the mythological which reveals its objectivity through the plot and through the author himself as its 'actor' or 'projector'. The author of a reflexive novel say, a Kafka or Proust, portrays the depths of 'human' psychology in a protagonist like, for example, the Land-Surveyor or Mr. Swann, who is the author himself or at least some aspect of him—such is the conscious or unconscious intentionality of the novel. In such a portrayal the protagonist is as unique as is the author, unique in his subjectivity. Because, for the author to recognize the otherness of his protagonist, or (*a fortiori*) of himself—be it in terms of type instead of individuality, or in terms of patterns of events instead of their irrepeatability—would amount to his yielding to the *necessity of unfreedom*. That is why in plots of the third kind the rejection of the otherness of the mythological has the effect of displacing it into the realm of the psychological through which it manifests itself. And that is why knowledge in this kind of plot is always *double*—one behind the other, or one within the other; one, as it were, 'opaque', the other 'transparent'. Thus the protagonist, in complete ignorance, can give effect to a plot, one knowledge of which (transparent) is related to himself (i.e., his type of personality, his individual characteristics, and the situation he finds himself in), and another (opaque) to the *cosmic* arrangement of the plot taken as a whole. Cosmic, because it combines various planes of existence, classes of beings, and points of view, his

knowledge *in* it always presupposing another which may happen to be a knowledge of it.⁶⁰

§10

*The hierarchy of knowledge, the lesser as superseded
by the higher and the lesser as encompassed by
the higher*

So, the initial ignorance of Oedipus was superseded by the knowledge of the oracle, and it in turn by the knowledge of the actual fulfilment of the oracle, in the end of *OK*. These three knowledges do, in fact, form the *diachronic scheme* of the plot of the whole trilogy. At the same time, we see many cases when one's knowledge—or ignorance, as the case may be—is, itself, the product or working out of another knowledge which requires it to be as it is. So, when Jesus says (Luke xxiii, 34), 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do', he meant not only the knowledge that what they do is a mortal sin,⁶¹ but another knowledge, underlying the first, that what they do will be done by them, *without* knowing it.⁶² Thus, when Tereisias blames Oedipus because he does not know who he is, he refers to the first, while Teiresias himself knows both knowledges and their hierarchy, being a professional prophet.

⁶⁰ Thus, in the final analysis, the writer's intentionality of plot here includes a projection of his mental dispositions, behavioural trends, and states of consciousness into the situations and events of another.

⁶¹ As in the case of St. Stephen's (Acts, VII, 60): 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'

⁶² That is, without knowing the whole (cosmos) of which their own situation (i.e., plot) is but a part.

§11

*Tendency, arising from suppression of the objectivity
of plot in III, for knowledge to be carried in the plot in
an inaccessible form*

In the intentionality of plots of the third kind, reflexive thinking thinks itself to be the *ultimate* knowledge (or the source of ultimate knowledge) of itself, and the plot to be its own product and creation. The direction of literary reflexion, here, is always from inside out, and the idea that its subjectivity derives from an objectivity outside the reflecting mind is rejected as an imper-missible *ontological* (or teleological) extrapolation. Here the intentionality of the author, superimposed upon its object, may operate to mask the action of the plot, which has passed through a mind which opposes its objectivity, appropriating it to itself. So, it can be said that it is in this case that a plot may carry its knowledge *unknowingly*, i.e., in a mode inaccessible to any self-awareness of its protagonists and reflexive thinking of its authors. As a result whatever, and however much, we may know of the plot's meaning, there will always be a certain *residuum* in this knowledge, which it is beyond the pale of our possibility to know, and which is more important and essential than that which is or can be known.

4

A COMMENTARY ON THE PLOT

(Knowledge as the pivotal factor in the myth of Oedipus)

Now, to return to Oedipus, to the plot of his story in which several different universes—the universe of blood (genes, ancestry), the universe of curse, the universe of names, the universe of places—are combined by means of one overwhelmingly important factor, the factor of knowledge, knowledge that, at the same time, differentiates these universes, crystallizes them as distinctly separate entities, and unites them into the space of the situation and temporal sequence of the plot. Let us consider, again, the plot of the trilogy, starting with the prehistory, as it were, of Oedipus's story, noting the instances of knowledge or of its absence. (In what follows my comments on the plot are contained in square brackets.)

II, 0.I.1. Tantalus *knew* what he did when he *roasted his son* Pelops, for which he was *punished* by gods.

0.1.2. Pelops *knew* that he *caused the death* of Enomaius through Mirtilus and *killed* the latter, though it is not clear *whether he knew* of Mirtilus' *curse* laid on him.

0.1.3. Pelops was *purified* from Mirtilus' blood, which, however, *did not cancel the curse*. [Purification here refers to one's life only, while curse refers also to one's posterity. They belong to two different plans; the first to the synchronic and individual, the second to the diachronic and collective.]

0.2.1. Kadmus *did not know* when he *killed the dragon* that the latter was a son of Ares. [As Indra did not know that the dragon Vritra was a Brahman.] Kadmus *expiated* (i.e., *purified*) this by serving Ares.

0.2.2. Echion *obstructed the cult* of Dionysus, for which the womenfolk of Thebes *were made mad* and *killed* Pentheus (and probably, Labdacus) *unknowingly*.

0.2.3. Laius *knew* what he did when he *abducted, raped, and drove to suicide* Chrysippus who *did not know* that on him was the *curse* laid on his father by Mirtilus. Laius *did not know* that he was cursed by Pelops or *forgot* about it.

0.2.4. Laius *knew* from the *oracle* that his future son would *kill* him.

1. Laius and Jocasta *mutilated* their child and *abandoned* it [but without having its blood on their hands!]. They *did not know* that it survived. [They also *did not know* that Pelops' curse was on *them*, personally and absolutely, as Pelops *did not know* the same about himself.]

3-4. Through the provocative remark of a revelling youth Oedipus *began to doubt* his knowledge of *who he really was*, 'a foundling or a legitimate son'. [In fact, in *that* situation he was *both*.] For this reason he went to Delphi, where he came to *know* what would happen to him and what he *would become* [i.e., the former by virtue of the *curse* laid on his father, and the latter because of his *personal* (and *unique*) predestination ensuing from the *operation* of the *curse* on his father and from the *punishment* for (and the *purification* from) his part in its execution].

5. The *vengeance for the rape (and suicide?)* of Chrysippus manifested in the Sphinx [was non-personal (collective) and *territorial, regional*, so to speak. It was not necessarily implied in or consequent upon Pelops' *curse*. Here we deal, in fact, with two *parallel*, lines in the plot: crime→curse→fulfilment of curse, and crime-pollution→purification by punishment (or for reasons of vengeance).]

7. Oedipus *killed* his father (and three of his servants), at the intersection of three roads. [He killed him *not because* he did not know

that Laius was his father, he killed him *and* did not know who he was, himself. For in 4 he was told by the oracle who he will be, not who he was.]

8. Oedipus *killed* the Sphinx [*personally* ('Nobody taught me' ...), without curse and punishment, i.e., unlike Kadmus or Indra. This, however conjecturally, suggests that the status of the Sphinx (or, perhaps, her class of beings) was somewhat different from that of Kadmus' dragon and Vritra. An earlier version of the Sphinx being a daughter of the two-headed dog Orthus (etymologically close to Vritra) and also related to the three-headed Chimera, shows that she was not altogether *definite as a being*, and therefore, killing her was not a real crime or even transgression.]⁶³

9–12. The *pestilence* brought on Thebes by Ares was a mere *punishment* for the failure to avenge the murder of Laius. [At the same time, it might be an *indirect vengeance* by Ares, for Oedipus' maternal great-grand-father, Kadmus, killed his dragon-son.]

13. Oedipus *curled* the *killer* of Laius [and, thereby, himself], calling himself a *stranger* to the story and to the deed. [The word 'stranger' implies here a *person who does not belong* territorially, in the first place, and a *person who does not know*, in the second. The latter allows for a *symmetrical* understanding of the word 'to know' as a *mythological structure of consciousness*: a stranger is a person who *does not know and is not known*.]⁶⁴

14–15. And when Teiresias *refused to speak* in order to 'bear out our...*destinies*', [it is that knowledge of the *objectivity of curse* that still remained to be fulfilled *without* as yet *being known*, that is referred to. The individual, personal character of fate (curse) is stressed when he says that it is *not fate* (i.e., Oedipus' rather than his) that 'I should be your ruin'].

16–24. When the *whole knowledge* was made plain, Jocasta hanged herself and Oedipus blinded himself, [the last action seems to be also strictly *personal*, for it was not explicitly mentioned either in the curse, or in the oracles. *The curse was not on Oedipus* personally, only punishment for the shedding of blood. For *he did not know who he was*, and not only—as in the case of Kadmus and in his own case when he

⁶³ That is, as mentioned in n. 6, we deal here with 'instrumental' entities.

⁶⁴ There are numerous mythological situations based on *asymmetry*. For instance the motif of 'doubles' presupposes that if, say, he is my double (copy), it does not follow that I am his double.

killed his father—who his victim was, on whom besides the curse had been laid. And though,] when the chorus reproached him for blinding himself, he referred to ‘Apollo that brought his sorrows to completion’, [this, as well as his exile from Thebes, can be regarded as that which was done to him (and by himself too) to expiate *his own* (not his father’s) misdeeds, and has nothing to do with the curse].

25–26. The Thebans *knew* from the oracle that their fate depended entirely on Oedipus. [That is, on Oedipus *as such*, which has nothing to do with anything that happened to him *before*, and implies his *extraordinary*, and, in future, *supernatural*, status. This is a typical example of *extra-knowledge*, that is, a knowledge which, though in itself *true* and beneficent if used, is not and cannot be acted on to frustrate the working out of *another knowledge* that underlies the first and makes it superfluous. This extra-knowledge, even if recognized, does not change the course of the plot, and remains, as it were, with the protagonist or protagonists. Extra- or inconsequential knowledge (i.e., knowledge without consequences) seems to be related to a mythical structure of consciousness which, though it knows what to do to arrest the implacable direction of the plot, nevertheless continues to acquiesce in the flow of events, due to the *objectivity of the whole* and the *subjectivity of the protagonist’s mental inertia* which, in its turn, is grounded in the objectivity of myth too.]

27–28. At Colonus, Oedipus *recognized* in a grove sacred to the Eumenides his last shelter promised by the *oracle* (in **4**). [All this happened as if he *had forgotten* the oracle during the interval between his travel to Delphi (in **4**) and the moment when the truth about himself was *revealed* to him (in **20**). Is it not incumbent on him, mythologically, that he should forget what happened to him as a result of a curse which was not laid on him personally, and also to forget the fact of his future being communicated to him? Then he *remembers* it, but only much later, when what had been predicted has already come to pass and has been fulfilled by him personally. It is, of course, a sheer banality to say that in *OK* and *OC* (as well as, possibly, elsewhere) a curse takes effect only when those who commit a crime *know* what they are doing (as we see it in **II.0**). Thus, the pollution caused by the criminal, either to himself (in **0.1.3**, **0.2.1**), or to the place (in **5**), or to both (in **9–12**), if not avenged, is followed by a personal or collective disaster which, however, does not substitute for purification, but serves rather as a *reminder* to those who *forgot* the unavenged blood and the necessity of purification. It is at this point (as in **11**) that the oracle follows in order to remind and communicate the knowledge of what is to be done. This,

in fact, is the only scene of *recognition*, that is, of *recollection* of that which was forgotten—in this case, the oracle received by Oedipus *before* the fatal meeting at the intersection of three roads, at which the first part of the prediction (that he will kill his father) was fulfilled. Then, when after solving the riddle of the Sphinx he married his mother (the second part of the prediction) he also forgot what had been said to him by the oracle. He ‘remembered’ them both only many years later—and this was no real recollection but rather an *exposition by others* forced on him by the catastrophic circumstances in Thebes. And what he recollected in the third part of the prediction was his *recognition of himself*, which cancelled not only his previous oblivion of the past but the past itself too.⁶⁵ What we deal with here is a phenomenology of oblivion which is related (‘opposed’) not, as is only to be expected, to memory, but to recollection and self-recognition in the sense of knowledge. There are in myths three cases of oblivion which, though often coinciding with one another, are phenomenologically quite different.

The first is when it is a *state of mind* when ‘one forgets’, i.e., a psychologically *subjective* state not necessarily related to the *concrete content* of knowledge. Although these states may be caused by some other mental states (as, for instance, Oedipus’ anger in 7) or actions (as the herald’s rudeness in 7), they also can be causes of subsequent events in a plot (as, say, when the enraged Oedipus killed the stranger and his three servants).⁶⁶ The second is when oblivion is not a subjective mental state but a purely objective factor correlated to knowledge as a ‘zero-knowledge’. Zero, because this knowledge either could never have been realised (recollected) subjectively (psychologically) by a protagonist anyway (as the new-born Oedipus brought to the slopes of Cithaeron and then adopted by the King of Corinth in **I**), or it was made

⁶⁵ Neither Freud nor Bion understood that self-consciousness cancels tragedy, provided that it *coincides* with the objective knowledge underlying the plot and, therewith, resolves it.

⁶⁶ A direct mythological parallel to this situation can be seen in the legend of Ulysses’ son, Telegonus, who also killed his father in a state of blind rage (acc. to Apollodorus’ *Epit.*), but almost immediately recognized his mistake. Also see in Hartmann, A. (*Untersuchungen über die Sagen vom Tod des Odysseus*, München, 1917). It would be interesting to note that both in the case of Oedipus and in the case of Telegonus oblivion (non-recognition) was mutual, which only underlines the symmetrical character of the phenomenon of ‘stranger’ (or ‘strangeness’).

psychologically impossible for it was, as it were, *ousted* by some other mental states or actions as, for example, the appearance of the Sphinx ousted the murder of Laius from Theban memory, or the struggle with the Sphinx ousted the killing of the stranger from Oedipus' memory.⁶⁷ In the third case we usually have complete oblivion artificially (or magically) induced.⁶⁸ In the first case oblivion is a positive mental state while in the second it is rather the *absence* of memory that matters. In the third it presents a direct *structural* parallel to death as we see it in many mythological plots. In all three cases, however, oblivion figures as *non-knowledge*, i.e., as a factor coterminous with and underlied by *the factor of knowledge*. Looked at this way it is not only determined by plot objectivity, but also creates the 'seams' and 'joints' of a plot, so to speak, at which one stage of the plot is connected with a subsequent stage. This brings us back to two decisive episodes: the infant laid on the slope of Mount Cithaeron, and the young Oedipus at the intersection of three roads. The first was preceded by Laius' knowledge of the future and the infant's 'natural' oblivion. The second was preceded by Oedipus' knowledge of the future and followed by his oblivion of this knowledge. Both episodes are determined by *objective* knowledge of the plot, which may also occur *within* the plot, for not only the author but some protagonists too *knew* the inevitability of the course of events, and it is these episodes that were meant not only to demonstrate the gap between the knowledge in some and its absence in others, but also themselves to produce that course of events, triggering the development of action in the plot. In this case, however, it is very important that these decisive episodes are situated in and marked by the places whose *intermediate* character is evident.⁶⁹

29–31. Now that Oedipus was fully *aware* of the significance of the *place* of his burial, as were the Thebans desiring to secure the guardianship of his grave but, at the same time not wanting him on their soil while alive with the unexpiated blood of Laius on his hands, he cursed them. Then Oedipus, on the advice of the chorus, performed an expiatory ritual to the Eumenides of the sacred grove, gave his blessing

⁶⁷ Or as, in the myth of Gilgamesh, the 'wild man' Enkidu is seduced by a courtesan and forgets himself as a natural being living with beasts of the forest. Schott, A. and von Soden, W. (eds.). *Das Gilgamesch Epos*, 1958.

⁶⁸ As happens to Ulysses, seduced by a sea-nymph, Calypso.

⁶⁹ As well as the intermediate role of these episodes themselves.

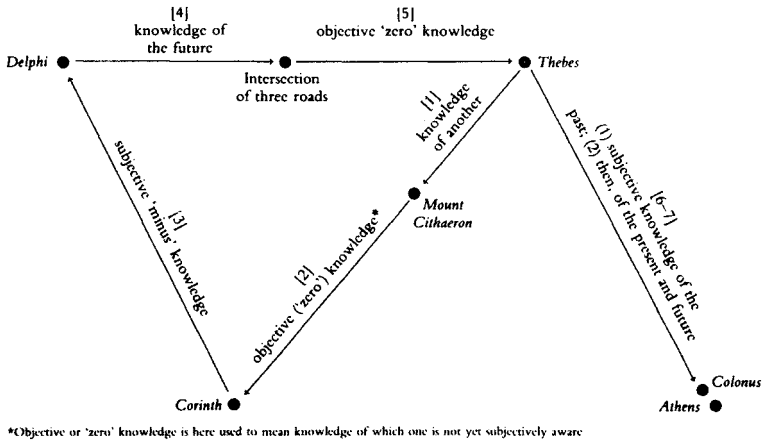
to Theseus and Athens and was adopted as an Athenian citizen.⁷⁰ [For Oedipus to recognize himself as *another*, i.e., supernatural *being*, the recollection (of Phoebus' oracle) must take place in *another*, i.e., supernatural *place* (the sacred grove), but to do so he must change his natural place too—to move from Thebes to Athens. Knowledge here is acquired *by stages* which are marked by *places*. So, here it is because of the knowledge of another (i.e., Laius), that he, *not being yet Oedipus*, was moved from Thebes to the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, on the *border between* Thebes and Corinth, and then to Corinth where he became Oedipus. After that he moved to Delphi *because* of the *doubts in his knowledge concerning himself in the past* but having obtained from the *oracle* the knowledge about himself in the future, moved *through the intersection of three roads* (at which he *forgot* this knowledge in order to bring about the first part of it) back to his home, to himself, to Thebes. After having received the knowledge of what he *was* Oedipus moves from Thebes and, at the end of his twenty years' wandering, ends up with the full recognition of what he *is* and *will be*, at Colonus near Athens. The whole 'itinerary' of knowledge could be depicted graphically in the following way:

The 'spatial' character of knowledge here is stressed by the fact that the *cult of the dead* is certainly more local than ancestral (i.e., temporal), as well as by the fact that the Thebans preferred his grave to be outside their boundaries, though regarding it as sacred.⁷¹ By the recognition of himself as 'the man of the sacred *place* he annulled not only the *past time of his own life* but also his *ancestral past* dating back to Kadmus.]

32–37. Creon tried to force Oedipus to return, calling him 'a stranger everywhere'. Oedipus put a curse on Thebes, referring to his *knowledge* of the future of Thebes. He cursed both his sons. [By cursing Thebes he annuls the *future* of his royal house, and by cursing his sons he annuls the future of his own blood and semen becoming, thereby, a complete

⁷⁰ It is noteworthy then that, (1) he was exiled from Thebes out of fear of *continuing* pollution of the *place*, and (2) he breached the confines of a sacred place, for which an expiatory ritual was deemed necessary.

⁷¹ From this it follows that Oedipus' exile from Thebes *did not* purify him from the blood of Laius.



stranger to all.⁷² His adoption as an Athenian citizen only emphasizes his 'inclusion' into the future of the new place that did not know him as a mortal being. His rejection of his kin and blood was *unnatural*,⁷³ but the main thing here is that it was a deliberate and conscious decision even if regarded as the fulfilment of an oracle related to *his* posterity (in II.4). The Ode of Death sung by the chorus is, undoubtedly, related to *normal* or natural death of natural mortal beings, followed by *funeral rites*. The comportment of Oedipus here is *extra-ordinary*, this time not only objectively but subjectively too, and anticipates his extra-ordinary end, and not the 'very naked death' of a simple mortal.]

38–41. The chorus warned of new ills coming from Oedipus, the *sightless stranger*, unless *fate* found its goal. Then it prayed that the *stranger* might pass to the fields of the dead. Oedipus, bathed and dressed, ceased to be seen by all but Theseus, and disappeared into a *space* unseen. Antigone concluded that he lived as he wished and himself chose to die among *strangers* in a *strange land*. [The chorus and Antigone here represent two different, and mutually opposed *natural* points of view concerning the extraordinary in Oedipus, given that neither of them *knew* what he *knew* (he knew that fate, at that very

⁷² As it was 'predicted' by him, when he wrongly asserted himself to be a stranger to everything Theban, not knowing that his was an *objective knowledge* related not to the past but to the future (II, 13).

⁷³ However strange it may seem, it is far more unnatural than the cannibalism of Tantalus in II, 0, 1.1.

moment, was no longer related to the curse *non-individually* affecting him, but to his new sacredness and supernatural knowledge given to him *personally*, and to nobody else).⁷⁴ The chorus believed that Oedipus, being blind, could not see (i.e., *know*) what might come out of his actions so that the outcome would rest with fate,⁷⁵ and that his death would be natural, as well as his posthumous existence in the fields of the dead (the latter is rather ‘the natural in the supernatural’). Antigone, on the other hand, thought that Oedipus simply *willed* to be what he was and what he was to become—an extra-ordinary man, no doubt, but not verging on the supernatural in his extra-ordinariness. Both points of view missed the same point—Oedipus’ final knowledge that led him from Thebes to Colonus, and from the natural to the supernatural, and coincided with the objectivity of fate (and plot). These two points of view also show a significant difference in the use of the word ‘strange’ (‘stranger’) in its direct relation to knowledge, to wit; the chorus thinks of a stranger as a person who is blind to reality of the natural (human circumstances) and supernatural (fate); Antigone sees strangeness as behaving like oneself and nobody else—a sign of a person! Oedipus’ only aside (in **II, 39**) compounds a definition of ‘stranger’ psychologically when he says the gods attend to madmen who reject the gods. It is this last characteristic of stranger that places him on the border between strangeness and uniqueness.]

42–50. After a debacle wrought on the Argive army when both sons of Oedipus were killed but Polineices’ body was left unburied, Antigone performed the ritual and Creon ordered it to be undone and put her in a rock-tomb. There she was to remain *alive in the place of corpses, a stranger to both the living and the dead*. Teiresias urged Creon not to *kill Polineices a second time*, leaving an unburied corpse in the upper world while interring Antigone’s living soul in the grave and confusing, thereby, the upper and lower worlds, and the nether gods with those above. The chorus recited the *Ode to Man*, and in the end concluded that no mortal can escape his destiny. [The whole *Antigone*, if looked at

⁷⁴ This knowledge is the knowledge of fate or, in fact, the knowledge of the whole plot (i.e., to the end). About a phenomenology of the sacred in relation to the supernatural see in Lecture Two, n. 41.

⁷⁵ This opposition of one’s *natural nescience* (blindness) to fate (also *blind* in many myths) is complemented in the myth of Oedipus by the also prophetic (and ‘professional’) blindness of Teiresias who *had known* in advance that Oedipus would blind himself and, thereby, could not have been overwhelmed by it as was the chorus (in **II, 23**).

from the angle of the myth and plot of Oedipus, is but a fulfilment of the curse laid by Pelops on Laius and his posterity and the curse laid by Oedipus on Thebes and his sons. The *Ode to Man* (II, 44), so extensively commented upon by Martin Heidegger, makes strangeness and even uniqueness man's almost generic and general feature in the sense that, indeed, man can do and think everything—we cannot know *what*—but can he?⁷⁶ He is a stranger to himself, and that is why he is a stranger to us too. He, in other words, is confronted with his own *otherness* objectively realised in the plot of a myth and *through* the structure and pattern of the latter. And when, and if, this realisation becomes subjective too, only then is the whole situation resolved in the protagonist's awareness of himself as a stranger. In fact, the content of the plot can be summarized by Antigone's description (in II, 41) of Oedipus as *a stranger who dies among strangers in a strange place*. This, however, brings us again to the point of connection of strangeness with place, or sometimes with space—whether it is the place one occupies in a class of beings, the place in the cosmos, or the geographical place. In other words, we deal here with the quite obvious relation of strangeness to the spatial configuration of myth. More than that, we may say that it is in strangeness that the objectivity of myth as configuration asserts and manifests itself. Yes, stranger as he was, Oedipus departed to death in the most extra-ordinary way, i.e., without his body being given the rites of death and burial—but this only underlines his transition from the class of men to that of local deities. And with Oedipus this *transition* to the supernatural is marked by an extra-ordinary death—he disappears in the *hole* in space—while with Polineices and Antigone the transition to the underworld is marked by *distortion* and *confusion* as regards their *place*: one, though dead, left unburied, the other buried alive, which would, inevitably, bring about dissatisfaction and anger in the deities of, respectively, the underworld and heaven. The surface of earth here is the place of death ritual (or its absence, which is the same), guarded by the Erynies or Eumenides who, as it were, mediate between the underworld and heaven on the one side, and between the underworld and the surface of earth, on the other. The breach of ritual here is concomitant with non-knowledge just as the

⁷⁶ It would be interesting to note here that if the *Ode* had been uttered not by the chorus but by Oedipus himself, that alone would have placed the story within the genre of reflexive novel.

transgression of the tabooed place and omission of the death ritual by Oedipus is concomitant with knowledge.]

5

SOME GENERAL REMARKS ON OEDIPUS

§1

The events of the second kind of plot (II) as taking place in the gap between objective and subjective knowledge which at the end are fused as one knowledge

The plot of Oedipus' story, like any plot of the second kind, appears only when knowledge not only becomes an independent factor but, more importantly, when it becomes *two* knowledges, objective and subjective. Or, in other words, when a difference in knowledge becomes absolutely decisive in developing the plot and bringing it to its end. But that can take place only if not all that there is to know or is to be known is already known to the reader, hearer, or even author, let alone to the protagonists, and even if the protagonists know it they know it differently. That is why among other things, knowledge, though important, is not an absolutely decisive factor in plots of the first kind, where the *typology* (the typological aspect of myth) still prevails. For Indra, as a member of the class of supernatural beings (*devas*), is or, at the very least, might be supposed to be aware of what he is, whereas Oedipus is quite definitely not aware till almost the very end, that is, when he too was to become a supernatural being. In the 'pre-history' of Indra (**I.0**) we have a myth, but not a *myth as plot*, for knowledge is absent there, and when it becomes relevant (in plot VII, Lecture Five), that is, when Indra wants to know, he is allowed his fraction of transcendental knowledge which eventually returns him to his 'natural' state of a more or less 'ordinary' god. Without that knowledge, however, he would have remained that passionate god which figures in **I** where knowledge, though present, is irrelevant. Or, putting it in a more general way, knowledge is that which changes myth as typology, topology, and pattern, into myth as plot. So, an extra-ordinary man (or king), Oedipus, was to become a deity not because he had failed to be a real son, husband and father, but by virtue of an *a-temporal* pattern or configuration of events prefigured in, or by, a curse. The whole plot of the trilogy can, then, be seen as a fulfillment or realization of that

configuration *in time*. But each event in the plot can be seen, as it were, as caused by a fact of knowledge or non-knowledge (or oblivion) of that configuration by a protagonist or the protagonists. And the plot is held together only by the linkage of 'knowledge' (or 'non-knowledge') which figures here as an event of such a kind that it links all the events and situations of the plot together.

§2

*The curse as the summary of the future plot,
encapsulating the time of 'old' knowledge prior to the
action and the time of 'new' knowledge during the
action*

There is, in the background of a myth as plot, an *old* (or *common*) knowledge, i.e., a knowledge which is supposed to be shared between all those involved. This knowledge—or its absence, i.e., when it is said not to have existed prior to the beginning of the course of events—is opposed to a *new* knowledge, that is, the knowledge acquired by the protagonists only in the course of events. The fact that Laius was murdered and that Oedipus saved Thebes from the Sphinx is old knowledge, whereas the fact that Oedipus murdered Laius is new knowledge in terms of *time of action*, although in terms of time *before* action, i.e., when the curse was uttered—which we do not know till it has been revealed to us—both knowledges belong to the *same* time, the time of knowledge. What is known or not known here is, in the first place, the curse. The curse as that 'summary' of one's future, which though itself *a-temporal*, is to become a plot, and is always knowledge in the sense that there is always somebody (as Apollo in Oedipus' case) who knows it as not yet fulfilled, or registers its fulfilment in the series of events of the plot. But a curse has also a phenomenology of its own, i.e., apart from its being (or not being) known.

§3.

*A curse as the instrument of reconciling action and its
consequences, the malefactor being progressively
deprived of the things of this life to become isolated
as extra-ordinary in a mythic situation*

The postulate underlying a curse is that retribution or punishment for a malefactor does not follow directly and automatically from his misdeed or transgression but waits, so to speak, till it is 'materialized' through an

intentional, deliberate, and conscious act. A curse is such an act. An act of cursing usually implies the impossibility of an ordinary or normal life for the cursed person so that he begins to become extra-ordinary and is introduced into a *mythic* situation. The last very often entails, or coincides with, the worst possible *human* situation, that is, a situation characterized by the subtraction of one or more of the attributes of ordinary life such as: eyesight, fertility, physical health, mental sanity—on the microcosmic level; continuation of one's male line or kingly power—on the macrocosmic level; timely or non-violent death followed by a proper performance of death rites—on the transformational level, etc.⁷⁷

§4

Analysis of a curse into three stages: (1) utterance, (2) intimation, (3) fulfilment

Each curse is presented in the plot of Oedipus' story as three events: (1) the curse itself, i.e., the very action of uttering or pronouncing it together with the name of the deity who figures as the guarantor of its fulfilment; (2) information about this curse or its results given by a guarantor through a priest, priestess, or prophet, i.e., an oracle, to a person who does not know of it;⁷⁸ (3) the result of the curse. The first event is the intentional action of an individual, directed *in time*—for its result is always postponed—against another individual and his posterity. On the other hand, it is an intentional action directed, as it were, *in space*—to a god or goddess and becoming, therewith, a *religious* and *sacred* action, a kind of ritual. This, in its turn, may result in bringing punishment not only on those cursed but also on their *place* or *places*.⁷⁹ [The action of consulting an oracle implies that over and above the matter on which he seeks an answer, a person does not know himself.]

⁷⁷ As we see here, the consequences of a curse succinctly reproduce in one at least two traits of the extra-ordinary, privation and isolation (Lecture Two, 3, §10). As for transgression, it can be observed from another point of view. See further below.

⁷⁸ Or, more precisely, what we deal with in the case of an oracle is the interpretation of one or another event in the sense of the curse.

⁷⁹ 'May result', because as we see it in *OK*, 720, a god may or may not make a curse effective.

§5

*Beyond the plot: Oedipus as Oedipus outside history
who repeats himself in the events of his life*

What we, as well as Sophocles and the chorus, call destiny or fate can always be reduced to a curse or its result. At the same time, there is 'something'—we could call it a mark of the extraordinary—upon some persons that will impel them to commit the actions for which they will be cursed and in some cases also to *know* their destiny as resulting from the curse, itself a result of those actions. So, whatever is called 'destiny' within the plot of the trilogy, it cannot be seen in terms of a curse as that which *causes* the plot; it is somebody's *actions* that come first and *generate* it, even if they precede this plot and form another plot related to this as its prehistory (as we see in **II.0**)—and only then does a curse appear on the scene to make action congruous with its results. It is here that again (see Lecture Two, 2 §4) we have to face a mythologically crucial question: Is it that 'something', inscribed, as it were, on a given person prior to all action, that already marks him out as extra-ordinary, strange or unique, or is it the events and situations that he suffers in the course of his life, together with his knowledge or ignorance of them, that make him extra-ordinary? In other words, is he his own history before that history begins? And are we dealing with the extraordinary as already there or yet to be?

§6

*Two versions of 'swollen feet': (1) Oedipus' name
came from his mutilation in the course of the plot, (2)
Oedipus had to be mutilated because he was already
Oedipus before it began*

In the case of Oedipus, however, we find these two versions in a certain balance. For, though Oedipus regards himself (and is regarded by the chorus) as strange *and* unique because of the extra-ordinary events of his life and the extra-ordinary sufferings caused by them he, at the same time, carries in himself that *personal unicity* which is absolute *per se*, that is, which does not depend on anything other than itself. Yes, of course, on the one hand, as we have already seen in the case of Indra too, he belongs to a *type* of beings called 'extra-ordinary', and that is why all these things happen to him. But on the other hand, the objectivity of the mythological in the plot not only predetermines the

course of his life, but also, as it were, prefigures him as an absolutely unique person. The latter can be seen in the fact of his *name*, 'the swollen feet', that calls for at least two explanations (incidentally not contradictory): the first, that his feet were mutilated [as in the case of Indra in I(4)] to fulfill the exigencies of the plot, including his name as one of them; the second, that it is when his fate was spun—and this could not be done without a name—that he was given the name that prefigured his personal unicity, the name, carrying which, he was ultimately to 'change' his class of beings and become a deity. In the first version 'the other' of a protagonist is what he has to pass through, that is, the plot (or story) of his life, by consummating which and bringing it to an end he becomes an extra-ordinary person. In the second, it is his name that itself carries his personness together with the whole plot not yet evolved in a series of subsequent events or situations. So for Oedipus to figure as the protagonist it was necessary for him to be called Oedipus by those who did so because of his swollen feet, not knowing that his feet had been mutilated just, as it were, to justify in a *reverse way* his name. Both versions can be subsumed under the third, which I would call 'ritual'.

§7

The plot as an 'eternal return'

As the sequence of actions in a ritual presents its purely spatial conscious plan, i.e., existing a-temporally, non-sequentially, simultaneously, so the sequence of actions, events, and situations in the plot of a myth presents its spatial configuration, its topology, so to speak, in which presentation of each next step or episode is no more than conventionally related to the previous one and the whole plot to its end too. So, for example, although, speaking subjectively, i.e., from the point of view of the chorus, the audience, and Oedipus himself, Jocasta was the only means or instrument for Oedipus to become the king of Thebes—in terms of the situation of the terror of the Sphinx and the death of Laius—objectively, i.e., from the point of view of the knowledge of the plot which Oedipus did not possess, he was the king of Thebes anyway. Thus the whole situation, like each and every ritual, is a kind of *repetition* or *imitation* of that which has already taken place objectively and at a time which is outside the time of the plot. The same is true of the situation when the king and the queen of Corinth were assuring him that he was their son and heir to the throne: subjectively they lied to him, not knowing that objectively he *will* be the king of

Corinth in twenty years' time. And it does not matter here whether the objectivity lies in the past or in the future in the time of a plot, for it lies outside that time anyway. And one's knowledge or, more often than not, non-knowledge of this objectivity is the only factor connecting the temporal with the a-temporal here. In other words, *for a protagonist to act and behave as the other, he must either not know his 'otherness' or, if he knew it previously, he must forget it.* And that is why an imitation of a myth is, in principle, impossible, for *when you think that you imitate a myth, you simply act, speak, and think mythologically.*

§8

The action of the plot as taking place in the gap between subjective and objective knowledge

As we have seen in the plot, its protagonists knew perfectly well what they were doing or, more precisely, what wrongdoings they were committing, barring the situations when the curse was not on them personally. So, Polineices, already cursed by his father, knew all too well what was going to befall him when he decided to storm and destroy his native city, though in doing this he did not know that his ruin was unavoidable anyway as a part of the package-curse that had been put on his grandfather. Nor was Laius aware of this when he decided to kill his son, though he knew about *his* fate from the oracle. But if in the case of Polineices it was a *conscious resignation* to his fate (i.e., curse), in the case of Laius, though he *believed* the oracle—for otherwise he would never have done what he actually did—he did not believe in its efficacy, in other words he did not *recognize* the otherness of the curse as himself. So, from the point of view of the objectivity of the mythological in the plot, his was a *partial knowledge*, i.e., his knowledge of fate and its non-recognition as himself. The same applies equally to Jocasta who, knowing that her son was destined to kill Laius (though *not* knowing that he was also destined to marry her), did not recognize herself in that situation either, or, again, might simply have forgotten the oracle communicated to Laius some twenty years previously, until it was too late or, more precisely, until the time came for that objective knowledge to become subjectively known.

§9

The plot as myth re-presented in time

Thus, the whole plot can be presented as an interplay of objective knowledges and their subjective recognitions or self-recognitions in which one recognizes *that* (i.e., the otherness) as oneself—but to what end? To transcend one's initial class of beings. It is about how the extraordinary becomes the strange to become the extraordinary again. It is about a stranger, who is a stranger also to himself, who becomes a god by fulfilling first in his partial, and then in his more and more complete knowledge, the objectivity of myth preceding its plot.

§10

*The objective knowledge of the plot, that exists
outside the plot, to be sought in the text understood as
an objectification of consciousness*

Now once again, we have to return to the plot of Oedipus' story as a plot of the second kind, this time, however, in the light (or, rather obscurity) of that which has been said above of knowledge as the main factor in the generation of the plot. It is in plots of this kind, unlike those of the first, that we see the knowledge *of* the plot and the knowledge *in* the plot as two different knowledges. The latter may, in the end, almost entirely coincide with or approximate to the former, but the farther we are from the plots of the first kind—here represented by the story of Indra—while not yet approaching those of the third, the clearer this difference seems to be. As such, the knowledge of a plot can be seen as being not only outside the plot but outside the content of text too, and if so, it can be, theoretically at least, sought in or ascribed to, the *text* understood in its first aspect (see Lecture Two, 1, §§4–6).

§11

*Which of us is Oedipus?' Is it enough to (wish to) do
as he did, or was he already Oedipus before it
all began?*

'Which of us is Oedipus?' asks Nietzsche—'Each of us is Oedipus', answers Freud. 'None of us is Oedipus till he has to be', answers the Sceptic. I for one, would answer this question, taking as a point of departure Aristotle's stand on this point, in the following way: some of us are Oedipuses—not those who killed their fathers and married their

mothers, but those who, *being* (not becoming in the course of the plots of their lives) extra-ordinary, transcended their class of beings, and in whom killing one's father and marrying one's mother was either a mark of their class of beings, or a mark of their extra-ordinariness, or both. But the text itself yields two different answers. The objective knowledge of the plot, though manifesting itself subjectively in Oedipus as a person, *objectively* includes Oedipus' *personness and name*, for there can be no person without a name. And it is in the sense of this manifestation of the objectivity of knowledge in Oedipus as a person that there can be only one Oedipus in the universe and no other or others. But in the sense of objective knowledge *in* the plot alone we may say, yes, Ulysses' son Telegonus who killed his father and married his step-mother is Oedipus, Indra though partly, is Oedipus...and so on. The gap between these two knowledges remains a 'mythological space' in the plot where one cannot be reduced to the other nor entirely explained in the sense of the other. Because, as Rigi von Rims formulated it, a resistance to interpretation is inherent in the very idea of text.

LECTURE FOUR

A Myth of Knowledge

(*The factors of myth*)

But man, even to himself,
is a palimpsest.

Th. Hardy

1

INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE, THINKING, AND UNDERSTANDING

§1

A return to text

In this lecture I would like to make a slight change in the focus of my observation of myth and, with it, the terminology used in its description. To do this it will be necessary first to return to text as the carrier of content *and* plot as distinct from plot as the carrier of myth and the mythological, and second, to introduce *thinking* as complementary to knowledge within the text, and *understanding* as complementary to knowledge in the observer of myths. As it was said above (in Lecture Two, 1), text is a concrete whole, a thing that does not yield to interpretation, unlike language whose tendency is to be interpreted entirely; a mythological text, then, would be a text the content (plot, etc.) of which has already been interpreted mythologically. Knowledge as an element of content and a factor in plot, can be presented (and described) as *final*, already formulated, a finite event or action, the processuality of which may be entirely lost (or not described) in the plot, and also as a *thing* already got or to be got, from which we may, only very conjecturally and infrequently, descend to thinking, including our own. And understanding will figure here as a

sheer methodological possibility to interpret a text as thinkable (and *thinking* too!) content.

§2

On 'understanding' as a kind of thinking

As the central notion of hermeneutics, understanding here is characterized by three main attitudes in the thinking of the investigator of texts, to wit: (1) his thinking is *consciously directed* to answering the why's posed by the content of a text without positively *knowing* them from that very text, for such knowledge could not have been deduced from the content. So, for instance, why the infant son of Laius had had his feet pierced while it would have been more than enough for him to die of exposure by being left for one cold night on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron (see Lecture Three, 1, Plot **II. 1**)? We can answer this question by understanding that his feet were mutilated—though seemingly so superfluously—so that he should fulfil or 'conform' to his name (Oedipus, 'swollen feet'); or we can go out of the text itself in our understanding and say—without directly answering the question—that the same happened to god Indra (see Lecture Two, 3, Plot **1.4**) establishing, thereby, a mythological configuration of events corresponding to a mark of an extra-ordinary person (see Lecture Two, 3, A, §10, trait D) which, of course, we also *could not know* from the text. [At the same time, it would be superfluous to ask why Laius commanded that his infant son was exposed on the slopes of Cithaeron instead of simply killing him? For it is already *known* from this text alone—not to speak of other known texts of Ancient Greece—that he did so out of fear of having his son's blood on his hands, etc.] (2) While being directed to the text the thinking in understanding constantly returns to itself and to the thinker, its carrier. An attempt to understand Oedipus as himself was, for Freud, such a return though, of course, it essentially remained an attempt to understand himself as Oedipus, at least in theory. Understanding, in this connection, is a case of thinking subjective *par excellence*. (3) And, finally—and that has been already mentioned here—in understanding our thinking tends to think of everything in text as *content*, and of itself as related to this content. The two other aspects of text (see Lecture Two, 1) become more and more blended with content.

2

A KING AND A BUCK: AN EXEGETICAL
ATTEMPT; MYTHOLOGY AS A TYPE OF
THINKING

Even the most elementary analysis of the simplest mythological text would force the investigator of myth to abandon an unilinear exegesis and invite him to attempt a hermeneutical procedure, taking into account not only all possible points of view explicated or implied in the text, but also the ways and modes of its perception by and from the point of view of the investigator of text.

No hermeneutical procedure, however precisely and clearly formulated by the investigator of mythology prior to his investigation of a given concrete mythological text, can be followed automatically. Before employing a hermeneutical procedure, the investigator of mythological texts should create—each time and in each case anew—a situation of *understanding*. This means that he should regard his own knowledge in general and his own knowledge related to a given concrete text and its content in particular on the same level as the knowledge or the knowledges which are in the text. In doing so he cancels the hierarchy of knowledges, destroys the presumption of objectivity, or lesser subjectivity, of his own knowledge in relation to the knowledge or the knowledges within the text, and thereby temporarily suspends his knowledge as absolute. ['Absolute' means 'the only *one*', not the one among many, and 'temporarily' means here and now, that is, while investigating this particular mythological text'.] His awareness of himself as the investigator of a given concrete text is placed by him, in his investigation, at the same level as the self-awareness of a personage in a myth or as the lack of self-awareness in the latter.

At the same time—and this is of paramount significance to any mythological investigation—the investigator *knows*—not is aware of but positively assumes as his central methodological premise—that his own acting, speaking and thinking (his thinking on myths included) could be subject to the same hermeneutical procedure as the thinking, speaking and acting of mythical personages. For what else is he doing while investigating a mythological text, other than putting himself in a mythological context? Or, more precisely, forming *one other* mythological context, broader than that he is investigating, by *consciously* adding to the latter himself and his situations already thought of by him as *objects* of such an investigation.

This suggests that *what we call 'mythology' here is more a special type of thinking about all actual or possible persons and situations rather than a special type of person or situation itself*. Or to put it in a more phenomenological manner, it is a special type of thinking (understanding, interpreting, etc.) from which mythological persons and situations arise—to be not only known but lived through too—and not the other way round. That is why so-called 'perceptual' or 'psychological' terminology (i.e., such words as 'to know', 'to think', 'to be conscious of', etc., with their derivatives) plays such an overwhelmingly important role in this approach, though it is used here only after having been stripped of all its 'psychologism' to become an objective element in the content of text.

Now I will try to apply this approach to several episodes and passages from various texts taken from different cultures and historical periods.

The beginning of one of the central plots (not of the *text*) of the ancient Indian epic, Mahabharata, starts with the following episode:

III.1.1. Vaishampayana said: King Pandu once saw in the great forest...a buck, the leader of its herd, mate with its doe. Thereupon Pandu shot both the doe and the buck with five swift,

2. sharp arrows. The buck was a powerful ascetic, the son of a seer, who had been consorting

3. with his wife in the form of a deer. Still coupled with his doe, he fell instantly to the ground and, his powers waning, cried out in a human voice: Even men who love evil, though wrapped in lust and anger, though bereft of all reason, stop short of atrocity! Man's mind does not swallow Fate, it is Fate that swallows the mind. No mind attains to things that Fate forbids. You have been born in an eminent lineage that has always been law-minded: then why are you now so overpowered by lust and greed that your good sense is reeling?

4. *Pandu said:* The way of kings with deer is as it is with enemies: they kill them. Do not blame me in your folly, deer! Deer are to be killed without subterfuge and trickery: that is the Law of the kings. Why blame me when you know that? The seer Agastya, when sitting at a Session, went hunting, sprinkling the wild deer in the great forest so that they were dedicated to all the Gods, according to the Law that is found in the Rules. Why blame us? Through Agastya's sorcery the omentum of your kind is offered at the sacrifice.

5. *The deer said:* They have never yet let loose their arrows on enemies without first considering. The best time to kill them is when they are weak.

6. *Pandu said:* Whether he is on guard or off guard, when he is exposed they kill him with sharp arrows. Why do you blame me, deer?

7–9. *The deer said:* I do not blame you for killing deer, king, because of myself. But out of kindness you should have waited until I was done mating! For what man of sense would kill a buck that is mating in the woods, at a time beneficent to all creatures and wanted by all creatures? This most cruel act is decried by all the worlds; it is ungodly and dishonorable, utterly against the Law. You know the niceties of the pleasure of women, and you know the points of Scripture, Law, and Profit—it is unworthy of you...to perpetrate such an ungodly deed! You yourself are beholden to punish people who commit cruelties and do evil, best of kings, people who have abandoned the three pursuits of life. What did it profit you, best of men, to kill me, an innocent? Me, a hermit who lives on roots and fruit, wearing the guise of a deer, who always dwells in the forest, seeking serenity? Therefore, since you have injured me, you yourself will fall victim to love: when you are helplessly overcome by love, your love will unfailingly kill you, who outraged a mating couple! I am Kindama, a hermit of unequalled austerities. I mated with a doe because I shy away from humans, and as a deer I live with deer in the depths of the forest. You will escape the guilt of brahmin-murder, since you *did not know that* you killed me in the body of a deer when I was overcome by love. But for that, fool, you shall suffer the same fate. When you are lying with a woman you love, blinded by your passion, you too in that very same state will depart for the world of the dead. And the beloved woman with whom you shall lie at the time of your death will fall under the power of the king of the dead, which for all creatures is inescapable. Just as you brought me to grief when I moved in bliss, so shall grief come to you when you have found bliss!

Vaishampayana said: When he had thus spoken, he, the deer, departed from life in great pain; and in that instant Pandu was overwhelmed by grief.

II. [After that, as the story runs, five sons were conceived by the wives of Pandu, begotten during the time of his abstention by the Divine Energies. By this his noble lineage was secured.]

III. 2.1–2. Once, in the months of spring, when the woods stood in full bloom, at the season when all creatures are crazed, the king used to stroll through the forest with his wives. And as he gazed upon the wood that was resplendent with mangoes, *campakas*, and many other trees rich in blossom and fruit, love sprang in his heart. In happy spirits he was leisurely wandering about, when Madri followed him, alone,

wearing one pretty piece of clothing. And as he watched the nubile Madri in her sheer skirt, his lust grew like a bush fire. Staring at the lotus-eyed woman, whose mood matched his, where they were alone, he could not control his lust, and lust overpowered him. He forcefully laid hold of his queen, while she writhed and with all her might tried to stop him. His mind wrapped by lust, he forgot the curse and forced himself upon Madri by the Law of copulation. Casting off all fear of the curse, the Kaurava, love-ridden to his death forcibly went into his beloved and the mind of the lusting man was crazed by Time itself, which churned his senses, and it was lost with his wit. Pandu, the supremely law-minded man, joy of the Kurus, succumbed to the Law of Time in the embrace of his wife. [*The Mahabharata*, Book 1, trans. and ed. by J.A. B. van Buitenen, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1980 (1973), pp. 246–8, 258–60.]

3

A COMMENTARY: AN UNDERSTANDING OF
THE MYTHOLOGICAL IN TERMS OF
DIFFERENCES IN KNOWLEDGE

§1

*Non-hermeneutical exegesis of myth in terms of
mythological content*

The ‘mythological’ in this passage, if we try to apprehend it using an unilinear non-hermeneutical exegesis, would have to begin with the narrator’s words that ‘the buck was a powerful ascetic...who had been consorting with his wife in the form of a deer’. For *we know* that it is supernatural transformations that mythology is about in the first place, whereas that which comes before these words, i.e., that the king ‘shot both the doe and the buck where they were mating’, may or may not have been ‘mythological’.

§2

*Hermeneutical ‘understanding’ of myth in terms of
differential knowledge*

However, to create a situation of *understanding* of the text, the investigator of texts should suspend his knowledge of what is and what is not mythological, and direct his attention to *who knows what* about

the events described in the passage. And it is from the *knowledges* of those within the passage that the investigator can learn about the ‘mythological’ in the first place, and not the other way round. For the fact or *event* (E) of the stag’s being an ascetic—i.e., the fact of his supernatural transformation—is revealed to the investigator through the *knowledge* (K) of the narrator Vaishampayana first, and the knowledge of the ascetic Kindama himself, second.¹ And it was revealed together with the fact that King Pandu *did not know* that the buck was an ascetic. [Whether or not the last knew, while being a buck or, in particular, while mating, that he was the ascetic Kindama, is quite another question to which we will address ourselves later.] This, however, is not to say that Pandu did not know that the great ascetics could transform themselves into bucks or into anything else, for that matter. But if so, such a knowledge would be *general* and not *situational*; that is, it would hardly have induced the hunter to see an ascetic in the buck he was shooting.

§3.

The natural and the supernatural as a function of knowledge within a myth

All that we see in **III.1** (before the narrator’s words, that, ‘the buck was a powerful ascetic’) is, as it were, *natural* (though ‘natural’ here is *my* term). As such it is, or might have been, known by everyone and in more or less the same way; and that is why the question of knowledge does not arise, for knowledge becomes relevant only when there are *different* knowledges in a passage or a segment of a passage. However, even in **III.1** the ‘naturalness’ of events and things described (hunter, deer, mating, shooting) remains, albeit implicitly, related to knowledge of them, not the other way round. That is, we understand the *whole* of situation **III** as mythological, only when the knowledges within it become different as regards their content and hierarchy. And it is their difference that, in fact, makes the situation itself (plot, episode, etc.) possible; and more than that, it makes the situation describable from the points of view of different knowledges. [In our case, from the point of view of the knowledge of Kindama (K_1^1), from the point of view of the

¹ The supernatural here means both one’s belonging to a class of supernatural beings and one’s ability to *transcend* one’s class of beings. See Lecture Two, 3, A, §3.

knowledge of Pandu (K_1^2), from the point of view of the knowledge of the narrator (K_2), or even from my own point of view as that of an investigator of texts (K_3), etc.]

§4

*The 'natural' and the 'supernatural' defined by
knowledge of them*

It is by means of and through knowledge of the events (or things) that they can be divided into, say, 'natural' and 'supernatural'. For only those who possess knowledge of the supernatural—in our case, the knowledge that the buck is an ascetic—can see the supernatural in the natural or can, by means of this knowledge, transform themselves supernaturally from a man to a buck. Then, the investigator's dichotomy 'natural/supernatural', as it is conceived of in our hermeneutical procedure (provided, of course, that he does use such a dichotomy, which is by no means obligatory), would be based not upon *his* knowledge of what is and what is not supernatural, but on the distinctions made by the different knowledges within the text in relation to the events described in that very text. These distinctions, dichotomic or otherwise, will, then, determine the classificatory differences of events and not the other way round.

§5

*Dharma and the return to the 'extra-ordinary' as that
which mediates between the natural and the
supernatural; the 'extra-ordinary' as a coming
together of two events ordinarily kept apart*

However, as soon as we return to a classification of the knowledges and their respective events in **III**, we are shown by the text itself that a dichotomic classification 'natural/supernatural' is not enough to understand the whole situation as mythological. First of all we see that in both Pandu's and Kindama's knowledges 'killing deer' is natural *because* it is, as it were, included into the *Dharma* (Law, Norm) of kings, that is, of those born by *fate* in royal lineages. [The difference in interpretation between the king and the ascetic on this point, as seen in **III**, 5 and 6, does not seem to be relevant.] The same, in principle at least, applies to the sexual act and to the act of death which, *as such*, are natural and *dharmic* too. But natural and dharmic as they are, sexual intercourse, death and killing (i.e., causing death) acquire a special

significance in a situation where they are combined with one another and related to a special kind of knowledge. So, in **III**, killing deer is as natural as making love, but killing a buck at the time of his love-making is singled out as something indeed extra-ordinary even if taken apart from its *a-dharmic* character. Likewise, dying is as natural as love-making, but dying at the moment of love-making is extra-ordinary—and not only from the point of view of the mythologist, but from that of the ascetic in our text, whose curse (**III**, 1, 8–9) predetermined the event through the king's *oblivion* of this curse (**III**, 2.2).²

§6

*The 'extra-ordinary' as complex; the 'extra-ordinary'
as a coming together of two 'special' events attracted
to each other in mythic thinking*

Furthermore, **I**, **III**, as well as many other texts in ancient India and elsewhere, suggest that there are in fact a limited number of events which, as it were, attract each other, forming thereby that which we call *extra-ordinary* (in Lecture Two, 3, A, §5). The latter are, therefore, complex by definition, whereas the former are 'simple' and 'atomary', so to speak. We will call these atomary events, in a merely conventional manner again, 'special'. Now it would be enough to say that events which in *ordinary* situations would *naturally* repel each other—such, for instance, as parents and sex, or close blood relations and killing (the 'incurables' as Aristotle calls them)—in *extra-ordinary* situations would attract each other. Thus, it is the extra-ordinary events such as 'killing (or dying) at the time of sexual intercourse', consisting of special events such as 'killing (or dying)' and 'sexual intercourse', which are situated in the 'mythological space' between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. In other words, the extra-ordinary *mediating* between the elements of natural and supernatural, binds them together into a whole within one mythological situation or a plot. But to this we will return later.

² See in Lecture Three, 4, A commentary on 27–28.

§7

*Knowledge and nescience; the 'state' of knowledge
and the 'state' of forgetting*

But again, it is the factor of one's knowledge of that 'mediation by the extra-ordinary' that determines the course of events in a mythological situation or, as is very often the case, one's lack of such a knowledge. So the whole situation of **III** together with the further development of its plot, has as its starting point (and its cause too even if looked at from the angle of a formal classification of plots produced by the folklorists) the fact of Pandu's *nescience* of the fact that the buck was the great ascetic Kindama, in the first place, and his ignorance of the Dharma (here a 'law') forbidding one to kill any mating animal or human, in the second. It is in contrast to that ignorance that we have Kindama, who knows not only the Dharma of the twice-born but the personal *fate* of Pandu too. It is a temporary suspension of his knowledge of the fate of Pandu (induced by the *non-conscious* state of the ascetic during his love-making) that 'attracted' the events of Pandu's killing him and of his own death, and it is the same suspension of Pandu's knowledge (or memory, in this case) during his sexual intercourse in **III. 2**, which attracted his own death.

§8

*The triple classification into natural, supernatural,
and extra-ordinary as indifferent to its objects and
infinitely repeatable*

Having said all this, however, I have to make one very important methodological reservation, to wit: the triple classification of the events and respective knowledges within a mythological situation into supernatural, natural, and extra-ordinary can be presented as a possible hierarchical scheme which, in principle, is *indifferent* to the concrete objects to which it is applied. More than that, I am strongly inclined to think that this classification or scheme itself is a mythical one, and not only mythological in terms of a discipline called mythology. That is, each of its elements could, again, be classified according to the same principle.³ So, for example, an event, together with the knowledge related to it, already put under the rubric of supernatural can, anon, be

³ See Lecture Two, 3, C, §23.

divided into the natural, the supernatural, and the extra-ordinary, and so on, as regards the hierarchy of knowledges. As, for instance, in the classical mythological tripartite scheme proposed by Dumesil (the gods of earth, the gods of atmosphere, the gods of heaven) we might see the point of view of the 'earthly' god of sacrifice, brahman, functioning as the factor generating this very scheme. [Then, the heavens would have to have, themselves, the same triple division, and their own priest (Brihaspati) presiding over the sacrifices to 'super-heavenly' gods, etc.]

§9

Fate as a mode of interpretation of event: a phenomenological characterization of fate

The term 'fate', in **III.1.3**, invites the attention of the investigator as a case of extreme mythological complexity. For here, as in many other texts, fate exists only as a 'knowledge of fate', and in no other manner. 'Man's mind does not swallow Fate, it is Fate that swallows the mind,' cries out dying Kindama. We know from the Mahabharata that the workings of fate may be natural or extra-ordinary, but the knowledge of fate can be supernatural only and exclusively. Fate itself is neither an event (or fact) nor, least of all, knowledge of an event; for it exists only as a *conceptual* basis for the interpretation of an event; as a special way of thinking about an event; or more precisely, as an *idea* by means of which one event is related to another within a given situation. So fate is a merely relational notion here—as is *karma* in this and some other sources—and, as such, has nothing specifically mythological. 'Fate swallowing the mind' is a powerful metaphor whose deciphering would depend wholly on a supernatural knowledge which *knows* fate as different from *dharma* and, at the same time, overlapping the last. Man with all his *natural* tendencies and propensities cannot transcend his fate, which is possible only through the ascetic's super-knowledge, and if one's fate (and not only one's *dharma*) forbids one to kill a mating deer, it is up to one not to transgress it. But if only one knew! One *must* have known—replies the ascetic, himself knowing perfectly well that poor Pandu could not have known, though he would have done better had he known his natural mind with its tendencies, such as lust, greed, etc., as well as his kingly *dharma* limiting and regulating these tendencies.

§10

Fate and Time (Death); curse as a way to knowledge

Fate may become a ‘thing’ and, thereby, enter the ‘field’ of mythology (even *dharma* may become so) on a par with *Time* (III.2) which ‘crazes the mind’ as Fate ‘swallows it’. Then they could be seen as two ‘poles’ forming that field: one predetermining a man’s dharmic status in life and his life’s course and driving (or dragging) him forwards; the other ‘moving’, as it were, ‘from the end’, in the direction opposite to fate, trying to destroy the order in man’s life on all its levels, to confuse its dharmic organization and hierarchy, and to make chaos prevail. Thus known (by the narrator in III, 2), Time is almost synonymous with death. Like death, Time ‘churns the senses and crazes the mind’. At the same time, and again in a way analogous to lust (or sexual intercourse), Time symbolises here the spontaneous, the non-conscious. It is the super-knowledge of Kindama that transcends Fate and Time and by resolving the tension between these two poles creates a special type of mythological situation: in fact, by his curse (itself a supernatural event) he imparts to Pandu a knowledge of his Fate, which the king, being influenced by lust, discards (as did Oedipus in II, though in a different situation).

§11

*An operational definition of myth in terms of
knowledge; the idea of Time arising from the idea of
time in narration*

As has already been noted, neither the supernatural knowledge of the ascetic nor the natural non-knowledge of the king can, if taken separately, make an event a myth. Only if they happen to be combined by means of the extra-ordinary within one situation (or a plot, or an episode) does that situation become mythological. A myth, therefore, can be putatively conceived as a term of description of an event wherein *hierarchically different* knowledges (as, for instance, the knowledge of the ascetic, the nescience of the king—this is the simplest case) figure within the same situation (‘knowledge *in* the myth’), which, in turn, may or may not have been known by the narrator of the myth (‘knowledge of the myth’).⁴ The narrator is not, speaking

⁴ Compare knowledge *in* the plot with knowledge *of* the plot in Lecture Three, 5.

phenomenologically, a figure absolutely indispensable for a *text* to be mythological. He is so only provided that the text itself contains a reference to knowledge *other than* (if not necessarily different from) the knowledge in the text. We might even go so far as to suppose that the idea of *time* in mythology can be understood as arising from the narrator's (and subsequently hearer's or reader's) perception of the *interval* between his narration and the event or events narrated. This interval is easily reducible to the difference between the narrator's knowledge, including his knowledge of events in the text, and the knowledge within the text itself. All this, of course, would by no means prevent the narrator himself from possessing a knowledge of the 'supernatural' and being himself included in a mythological situation serving, as it were, as a *mediator* between the 'natural audience' and the supernatural events (or the supernatural *in* the events) which he sees or knows.

§12

Apperception as a background knowledge of the narrator

As was clearly seen in **III**, the mythological situation generated (or triggered) by the 'extra-ordinary' within the field of tension between the supernatural knowledge of the ascetic and the natural knowledge of the king, takes place in the context of *apperception* of certain ideas, to wit: Dharma, Fate, Time. The term 'apperception' here means that these are ideas shared by all personages, i.e., that everybody could have known *about* them, which, of course, is not to say that everybody actually *knew* them [as, for instance, the idea of gravity in our present-day common apperception]. These ideas may be natural or supernatural depending on the naturality or supernaturality of one's knowledge and, again, it is the difference between various knowledges of these ideas, that makes them mythological. For as such they remain, as it were, in the background, as neutral conditions behind the mythological situation. The narrator, as a rule, knows them, for his is, by definition, a 'background knowledge' formed, among other things, by these very ideas and by the text he narrates.

§13

*The knowledge of the narrator, the time of knowledge,
and the transcendental knowledge; the narrator as
knower of the plot, but not necessarily of the
transcendental knowledge in the plot*

But does the knowledge of the narrator exhaust that of the personages within the myth and, above all, the supernatural knowledge of those who possess it? It follows from the preceding paragraphs that it does not and it is at this point of our hermeneutical wanderings in 'mythological space', so to speak, that we have to define once and for all the epistemological position of the narrator of the myth and our own as its investigators: a narrator, even if he is himself a great ascetic or rishi, like Vyasa or Vaishampayana of the Mahabharata, knows the framework within which the knowledges of various personages operate *as events in time* or, in other words, he *knows the plot before we know it*, and knows it forwards and backwards as a sort of 'space of events'. So, like Apollo (and partly Teiresias) in Oedipus' story he must know beforehand what will befall the poor king (while the latter or the chorus in **II** do not know it); that is, the narrator knows Pandu's fate, but his knowledge, as has already been stated, does not stretch beyond the situation and, even if he knows about the workings of Fate in general too (as Kindama does), he cannot know Fate in the same way as those from whose divine knowledge Fate itself issues as an event in a mythological situation or plot. This transcendental knowledge, when present in a mythological situation, is presented as an event of partial disclosure of its content, that is, it is the *fact* of disclosure which constitutes an event here, for that which is disclosed necessarily exceeds the situation and may even neutralize (i.e., render 'non-mythical') its myth.

§14

*The narrator functioning in the time of his narration
and in the time of his tradition: the content of a myth
does not show its function; myth and religion*

This, of course, does not exhaust the subject of the narrator as a phenomenological problem. For he is also a maker and carrier of tradition, i.e., he transmits the text through *time*, and not only to his readers or hearers at this very moment. By this he is placed within a given tradition, which is not the same as to be placed within the plot of the text narrated by him. Or, in other words, the narrator himself is mythical by virtue of being included into an already patterned and formed situation which the mythologist has already conceived of as mythological and within which the narrator's position is fixed by virtue of his belonging to a greater or broader tradition—as, for instance, Vyasa of the Mahabharata belongs to the Great Vedic Tradition. And even if he be, himself, divine or half-divine, he is bound, in his narrator's knowledge (K_n), to remain within that great or greater tradition and, consequently, his knowledge will always be inferior to that which may have been exhibited in the *content* of a myth. For what he *adds* to a text which has already been called by *us* 'mythological' is its *function*, such, for instance, as 'religious', 'sacred', 'profane', etc. The last is, in principle, un-establishable on the basis of the text's content, un-deducible from the content of myth, so to speak.

§15

The function of myth independent of its content

From this it follows that *there is absolutely nothing in the content of a myth itself that could lend support to the idea of its function*, for the latter always remains *subjective*, i.e., dependent on the perception, reception and use of the myth, whereas the myth can be seen as *objective*, i.e., as text and content. For religion, in its relation to myth, is more about how to employ the myth, while myth is more about that which is there to be told, and even if that were, in its turn, about religion—as in the cases when a myth includes in itself the description of worship, ritual, etc.—it would remain religiously neutral unless actually used or interpreted in a concrete religious context or appropriated by a religious tradition.

§16

*One step aside: from knowledge to reflexion:
limitation of the narrator*

One final point. The narrator may know more about the events and circumstances of a myth than any of its protagonists or all of them taken together. This, however, is not to say that his would be *reflexive thinking* on the knowledge, let alone thinking, *in* the myth. This is his most important phenomenological limitation. So, to take the Mahabharata as an example, its narrators, while relating the *fact*, or *event*, of the Highest Knowledge of Krishna, cannot deduce from this fact anything about Krishna's thinking—and reflexive thinking is thinking about thinking, not about events or about knowledges. Though, of course, this may become the aim of a daring attempt by the mythologist.

§17

*Curse, knowledge, and place: a comparison with
Oedipus*

Both Pandu and Oedipus are cursed, but the former directly and *ontogenetically*, so to speak, and the latter indirectly and *phylogenetically* for he inherited the curse from Laius (himself the inheritor of the ill-starred succession started with Kadmus, the dragon-slayer, on the maternal side, and with Echion, the mystoclast, on the paternal one).⁵ In the case of Pandu, the punishment (by sexual abstention) runs parallel with curse, in the case of Oedipus one follows the other. The sons of Oedipus perished, those of Pandu's were not his (i.e., not from his semen).

Pandu is not aware of himself as strange or unique—his extraordinariness remains merely objective. Only because he finds himself *naturally* (he went a-hunting as any other king) in a *supernatural* situation, produced by his meeting with the great *rishi* (see Lecture Two, 3, A, §12), an extra-ordinary being by definition (let alone

⁵ The theme of dragon- (or serpent-) slaying can be traced throughout the world of Indo-European mythology (and far beyond), with its everlasting ambiguity from *Iranian* Indra to Oedipus himself who continued the line by killing the Sphinx. The ambiguity here is stressed by the fact that the dragon or serpent killed by Oedipus' great-great-grandfather Kadmus was the sacred animal (totem?) of the *old* royal house of Thebes. See in Frazer, J.G. *The Golden Bough*, 3 vol ed., part III. The Dying God., 2., 1920, p. 84.

supernatural), does he reveal his own extra-ordinariness of which, as an *ordinary* king, he cannot be aware. Although he, as it were, *knew* what he was doing when he killed the coupling deers in the sense that he knew himself who killed them, he *did not know* who they were. That is, in the case of Pandu, the knowledge of who are the deer and who is he are two different knowledges, whereas in the case of Oedipus when he killed a stranger not knowing who he was, it was *one and the same knowledge*. That is, for Oedipus to know his father is tantamount to his knowledge of himself, his own self-recognition, a situation totally alien to the Indian ascetic idea of self-knowledge. In this sense, Pandu, unlike Oedipus who became aware of himself in the end, did not know himself otherwise than cursed.

It is the fact of Pandu's non-self-recognition that fixes the whole plot of **III** in *one place*. There can be no change in plot, nor in its protagonists, without a change in knowledge. Pandu resides, hunts, makes love, and dies, roughly speaking in the same place. Contrary to the *itinerary of knowledge* in **II** (Lecture Three, 4, a commentary on **29–31** of the plot), in **III** nothing happens that would require *space*, for there is no transmission of knowledge in space there, only in the *time* of one's life.

4

A PRINCE AND THE GOD: WHO KNOWS WHAT?

Let us now take another very well-trodden mythological situation from the same Indian epic—the situation described in the Bhagavadgita, itself the 3rd episode of the 6th Book of the Mahabharata (see above, in Lecture One).

IV.I.14. *Vaiśampāyana* said: Then **Samjaya**, who had an immediate insight into all things past, present and future, returned from the battlefield. Grief-stricken, he hastened to the brooding **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** and told him that Bhishma lay dead.

Samjaya said:⁶ I am **Samjaya**, great king. My homage, bull of the Bharatas! Your father **Bhīṣma**, son of **Samtanu** grandfather of the Bharatas, is dead!

23[1]. Dhṛtarāṣṭra said: When in the Field of the Kurus, the Field of the Law, my troops and the **Pāṇḍavas** had massed belligerently, what did they do, **Samjaya**?

⁶ He said this because Dhritarashtra is blind.

Samjaya said:⁷ When King Duryodhana saw Arjuna's army arrayed, he approached the Teacher and said "Look at that mighty host of the sons of Pāṇḍu, marshaled by Arjuna...."

The ape-bannered Arjuna, seeing the enemies in position, lifted his bow when the clash of arms began, and said to Krishna: '... station my chariot in between the two armies, far enough for me to see the eager warriors in position—for, who am I to fight in this enterprise of war? I want to see the men who are about to give battle....'

At Arjuna's words, Krishna stationed the fine chariot between the two armies, and he said, 'Behold the Kurus assembled!' Arjuna saw them stand there, fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, fathers-in-law, and good companions, in both armies. Watching all his relatives stand arrayed, he was overcome with the greatest compassion, and he said despairingly, '...when I see all my family poised for war, my limbs falter and my mouth goes dry. There is a tremor in my body and my hairs bristle. My bow is slipping from my hand and my skin is burning. I am not able to hold my ground and my mind seems to whirl. And I see contrary portents,...but I see no good to come from killing my family in battle! I do not wish victory,...nor kingship and pleasures. What use is kingship to us, Govinda? What use are comforts and life? The very men for whose sake we want kingship, comforts, and joy, stand in line to battle us, forfeiting their hard-to-relinquish lives! Teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relatives-in-law—I do not want to kill them, though they be killers, ...even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone earth!

'With the destruction of family the eternal *family Laws* are destroyed. When Law is destroyed, *lawlessness* besets the entire family. From the prevalence of lawlessness the women of the family become corrupt, Krishna; when the women are corrupt, there is *class miscegenation*, and miscegenation leads to hell for family killers and family. Their ancestors tumble, their rites of riceball and water disrupted. These evils of family killers that bring about class miscegenation cause the sempiternal class Laws and *family Laws* to be cast aside. For men who have cast aside their family Laws a place in hell is assured, as we have been told.

⁷ What follows is the tale of the battle told by *Samjaya* ten days after the event. We omit the whole story and return to the first day of the battle. The text that follows is given with abbreviations.

‘Woe! We have resolved to commit a great crime as we stand ready to kill family out of greed for kingship and pleasures! It were healthier for me if the enemies..., weapons in hand, were to kill me, unarmed and defenseless, on the battlefield!’ Having spoken thus, on that field of battle, Arjuna sat down in the chariot pit, letting go of arrows and bow, his heart anguished with grief.

24[2].I. *Samjaya* said: Then, to this Arjuna who was so overcome with compassion, despairing, his troubled eyes filled with tears,

The Lord said: Why has this mood come over you at this bad time. Arjuna, this cowardice unseemly to the noble, not leading to heaven, dishonorable? Do not act like a eunuch,...it does not become you! Rid yourself of this vulgar weakness of heart, stand up, enemy-burner!

Arjuna said:

My nature afflicted with the vice of despair,
My mind confused over what is the Law,
I ask, what is better? Pray tell me for sure,
Pray guide me, your student who asks for your help!

***Samjaya* said:** Having spoken thus to Krishna, Arjuna said, “I will not fight!” and fell silent. And with a hint of laughter Krishna spoke to him who sat forlorn between the two armies.

The Lord said: You sorrow over men you should not be sorry for, and yet you speak to sage issues. The wise are not sorry for either the living or the dead. Never was there a time when I did not exist, or you, or these kings, nor shall any of us cease to exist hereafter. Just as creatures with bodies pass through childhood, youth, and old age in their bodies, so there is a passage to another body, and a wise man is not confused about it. The contacts of the senses with their objects, which produce sensations of cold and heat, comfort and discomfort, come and go without staying, ...endure them. The wise man whom they do not trouble, for whom happiness and unhappiness are the same, is fit for immortality.

There is no becoming of what did not already exist, there is no unbecoming of what does exist: those who see the principles see the boundary between the two. But know that that on which all this world is strung is imperishable: no one can bring about the destruction of this indestructible. What ends of this unending embodied, indestructible, and immeasurable being is just its bodies—therefore fight, Arjuna! He who thinks that this being is a killer and he who imagines that it is killed do neither of them know. It is not killed nor does it kill.

The man who knows him for what he is—indestructible, eternal, unborn, without end—how does he kill whom or have whom killed, Arjuna?

As a man discards his worn-out clothes
And puts on different ones that are new,
So the one in the body discards aged bodies
And joins with other ones that are new.

Swords do not cut him, fire does not burn him, water does not wet him, wind does not parch him. He cannot be cut, he cannot be burned, wetted, or parched, for he is eternal, ubiquitous, stable, unmoving, and forever. He is the unmanifest, beyond thought, he is said to be beyond transformation; therefore if you know him as such, you have no cause for grief. **IV.2.3.3.** [11] *Arjuna said:* This ultimate mystery bearing upon the soul, which you have propounded to me as a favor, has dispelled my delusion. I have heard from you in all detail the becoming and unbecoming of the creatures, lotus-eyed one, and your own indestructible greatness. Now I wish to set eye on your real, supernal form, just as you have described yourself, sovereign lord, Supreme Person! If you think that I shall be able to look upon it, lord, master of Yoga, display to me your imperishable person.

The Lord said: Arjuna, behold my hundreds and thousands of shapes, of many kinds, divine, in manifold colors and figures. Behold the entire universe with standing and moving creatures centered here in this body of mine—and whatever else you desire to see. But you shall not be able to look upon me with just your ordinary eyes: I shall give you divine sight: behold my sovereign Yoga!

Samjaya said: Having thus spoken, the great sovereign of Yoga, revealed to Arjuna his supreme supernal form, with countless mouths and eyes, displaying multitudes of marvels, wearing numbers of divine ornaments, and raising divine weapons beyond count.

If in the sky the light of a thousand suns were to rise at once, it would be the likeness of the light of that great-spirited One. In that body of the God of Gods Arjuna saw the entire universe centered, in its infinite differentiations. He was stunned, and he shivered. He folded his hands, bowed his head and said—

Arjuna said:

I see all Gods in your body, O God,

And all creatures in all their varieties—
On his lotus seat the sovereign Brahma,
The seers all and the snakes divine.

Your own infinitude stretching away,
Many arms, eyes, bellies, and mouths do I see,
No end do I see, no beginning, no middle,
In you, universal in power and form.

Beginningless, middleless, endless, almighty,
Many-armed, with eyes that are sun and moon,
I see you with mouths that are blazing fires
Setting fire to this world with your incandescence.

All space that extends between heaven and earth,
All horizons are filled by you alone;
Having seen your dreadful and wondrous form
The three worlds shudder, great-spirited One!

At the sight of your mass with its eyes and mouths,
Multitudinous arms, thighs, bellies, and feet,
Strong-armed One, and maws that are spiky with tusks
The worlds are in panic and so am I!

And yonder all sons of **Dhṛtarāṣṭra**
Along with the hosts of the kings of the earth,
Like **Bhiṣma**, **Droṇa**, that son of a *sūta*,
Along with our own chief warriors too.

Are hastening into your numerous mouths
That are spiky with tusks and horrifying—
There are some who are dangling between your teeth,
Their heads already crushed to bits.

As many a river in spate ever faster
Streams oceanward in a headlong rush,
So yonder heroic rulers of earth
Are streaming into your flame-licked mouths.

As moths on the wing ever faster will aim
 For a burning fire and perish in it,
 Just so do these men increasing their speed
 Make haste to your mouths to perish in them.

You are greedily licking your lips to devour
 These worlds entire with your flickering mouths:
 Your dreadful flames are filling with fire,
 And burn to its ends this universe, **Viṣṇu**!

Reveal to me, who are you so dread?
 Obeisance to you, have mercy, good God!
 I seek to encompass you who are primeval,
 For I comprehend not the course you are taking.

The Lord said:

I am Time grown old to destroy the world,
 Embarked on the course of world annihilation:
 Except for yourself none of these will survive,
 Of these warriors arrayed in opposite armies.

Therefore raise yourself now and reap rich fame,
 Rule the plentiful realm by defeating your foes!
 I myself have doomed them ages ago:
 Be merely my hand in this, Left-handed Archer!

Slay **Droṇa** and **Bhiṣma** and Jayadratha,
 And **Karṇa** as well as other fine warriors—
 My victims—destroy them and tarry not!
 Wage war! You shall trounce your rivals in battle!

Arjuna said:

The Original God, the Person Eternal,
 You are of this world the ultimate support,
 The knower, the known, the final abode—

All is strung upon you, of infinite form:

I wish now to see you again as before,
With your diadem, mace, and discus in hand,
Assume once again your four-armed form,
O thousand-armed One, embodied in all!

The Lord said:

Out of grace for you, Arjuna, have I revealed
By my power of Yoga my highest form,
Full of fire, universal, primeval, unending,
Which no one but you has ever beheld.

Not with Veda or rites, not with study or gifts,
Not with sacrifice or with awesome *tapas*
Can I in this world be beheld in this form
By any but you, great hero of Kuru.

Have no more fear, be no longer bemused
By the sight of this form of me so awe-inspiring;
Your terror gone, your heart again pleased,
Set eyes once more on the body you know!

Samjaya said:

Quoth Vāsudeva to Arjuna
And showed him once more his form of before,
And put that terrified man to rest
By becoming again his gentle old self.

IV. 40[18]. *The Lord said:* Arjuna, have you listened to this with concentrated attention? **Dhanamjaya**, is your ignorant delusion now gone?

Arjuna said: The delusion is gone,...and by your grace I have recovered my wits. Here I stand with no more doubts. I shall do as you say.

Samjaya said: Thus have I heard this Colloquy of Krishna and the great-spirited Arjuna, marvelous and enrapturing. By Vyāsa's grace I

have heard this supreme mystery, this yoga, from that Master of Yoga Krishna himself, who told it in person. Wherever Krishna the Master of Yoga and Arjuna the archer are, there, I hold, are fortune, victory, prosperity, and a steady course.

[*The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*, trans. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1981, pp. 39, 69–77, 111–121, 145.]

5

A SYNTHETICAL COMMENTARY

What follows is a development and a far more detailed interpretation of that which was already briefly commented upon in Lecture One.

§1

The exposition: the battle-field as a setting for instruction

In the beginning of **IV**, King Dhritarashtra's bard and charioteer, **Samjaya**, endowed with a supernatural ability to see and hear (i.e., to know) from afar, relates to the king what happened on the great battle-field of Kurukshetra, starting from the moment before the beginning of the battle, which was to be fateful for both parties. As his narration goes, the great commander and hero of the Pandavas, Arjuna, asks his charioteer, close friend, faithful ally and distant cousin Krishna to drive his chariot to the very centre of the battle-field. There Lord Krishna Vasudeva displays to Arjuna a part of his Divine Knowledge, and this miraculously coincides in time, is synchronous with **Samjaya's** *perception* of it, related thereafter to Dhritarashtra. For, being at a considerable distance from Krishna and Arjuna conversing in the chariot, **Samjaya** was able to register their conversation only because of his supernatural vision and hearing, i.e., his super-knowledge. In fact, it is the synchronicity of the last with the Divine Knowledge of Krishna that makes the whole situation possible. This alone would not suffice, however, to make it mythological even potentially. To do that a simple ordinary knowledge (or ignorance) is needed, and it is amply provided by most of the warriors from both clans, who regard the battlefield, the impending battle, as well as the causes leading to it, as purely natural. Prince Arjuna, himself a man definitely devoid of supernatural knowledge of any sort, can be considered an epitome of naturality, while Krishna undoubtedly represents the Divine Knowledge.

§2

The field no ordinary field, and the battle no ordinary battle

Within an interval of a few seconds Krishna explains to Arjuna that the battle is, in reality [‘in reality’ means that which cannot be natural, i.e., cannot be seen by natural eyes or heard by natural ears], not a natural ordinary battle, but the battle of all battles, the unique and exemplary battle that makes all the battles preceding it insignificant and all future ones superfluous. For this battle is the final scene of the great interplay of Divine Cosmic Forces which are inaccessible not only to the ordinary knowledge of ordinary people but to the super-knowledge of the great ascetics too.

§3.

Events that change according to our knowledge of them

After having imparted to Arjuna a very simplified version of his Divine Knowledge (a version corresponding to the super-knowledge of a great ascetic, shall we say), Krishna the Lord sends Arjuna back to battle and entreats him to fight and to win as if it were as ordinary a battle as any other, but to do so with an entirely different knowledge of the present situation, the events to come, himself and, to a degree, Himself too. To sum up the whole episode: **Samjaya** (he is the ‘sub-narrator’ here, for his narration is included into the framework of Vaishampayana’s narration) relates through his super-knowledge to Dhritarashtra, a man of natural knowledge, how the Divine Charioteer Krishna instructs Arjuna, a man of natural knowledge too, in the Divine Knowledge of Self (*ātman*), His own Self, and the things which hitherto were seen as natural (war, battle, battle-field, etc.).

§4

An operational definition of the extra-ordinary through knowledge and meaning; the four points in the plot of IV

Three knowledges here—divine, supernatural, and natural—are interconnected within a mythological situation, tied together within one mythological plot, so to speak, by means of four points in the content of **IV**, which, as in **III**, though natural in themselves, assume the function

of mediation between these knowledges. These points are instances of the ‘extra-ordinary’ which, in fact, is seen as extra-ordinary not only by the mythologist but also by those immediately involved in the situation—otherwise how could it be that these three (narrator, god, ordinary man) figure together in so many myths of other regions and cultures?

§5

*The specificity of the meaning of the extra-ordinary
within myth*

Now I would characterize the extra-ordinary here in a way slightly different from that in **I**, **II** and **III**: the extra-ordinary would denote, in the context of mythological situations, plots, etc., that which is *known* by a person or persons in the plot (and not only by the mythologist) as having a meaning or meanings other than that ascribed to it when it figures outside a mythological context. But even outside this context it is usually seen as containing the possibility to be, in one way or another, combined with the supernatural or to be a *sign* of the latter.

§6

*The four extra-ordinary points of conjunction in the
plot of **IV***

These four points, though natural *per se*, but in combination with other points forming what we have called above ‘extra-ordinary events’, determine the time-space framework of the central plot in **IV**. That is, the plot within which Lord Krishna’s theoretical explanation as well as practical instruction delivered to Arjuna is but one event which, in its turn, can be hermeneutically understood as having its own plot with its own mythological elements in it.

The first point is the blindness of Dhritarashtra who is thus deprived of his ‘natural’ means of witnessing the battle, and has to turn to **Samjaya** whose supernatural vision substitutes for the king’s lack of natural sight. **Samjaya**, being a charioteer himself, narrates to the king the story where god Krishna figures as Arjuna’s Divine Charioteer—this is the second point. Then Krishna, at Arjuna’s request, puts his chariot in the centre of the battle-field, between the two armies, so that Arjuna can observe both sides before the battle starts—this is the third point. And, finally, Arjuna feels utterly despondent and does not wish to fight, which constitutes the fourth point.

§7

The three frameworks of narration in IV: narration as an event

Then Krishna the Lord gives Arjuna his Divine Instruction whereupon Arjuna returns uplifted from the middle of the battlefield to his army, and the battle begins. So we have three frameworks with their respective plots here. The first (A) embraces the dialogue between Dhritarashtra and **Samjaya**. The second (B) presents the course of events on the battle-field culminating in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. The third (C) describes that which is included *within* this dialogue, that is, if we discard Arjuna's questions and Krishna's instruction, the Bhagavadgita proper, so to speak.

The following scheme will show the whole of IV as a configuration of the main events within the framework of the three narrations (the four 'extra-ordinary' points are underlined): Narration A: Vaishampayana (a pupil of Vyasa) narrates the whole Mahabharata to Janamejaya, great-grandson of Arjuna, and his narration includes:

Narration B: **Samjaya**, the charioteer of Dhritarashtra, narrates to the blind king that—

(1) Arjuna asks Krishna to direct his chariot to the middle of the battle-field;

(2) Seeing both sides, and so many of his relatives and friends on the side of his enemies, Arjuna has become utterly despondent and wants to relinquish the field of battle;

(3) Krishna and Arjuna have held a dialogue (narration C) wherein the God imparts to Arjuna His Divine Knowledge; and

(4) Arjuna, uplifted and resolute, decides to fight (narration B again).

§8

Mythological metaphors: the charioteer as a metaphor of soul

Now let us once again recapitulate the story.

In A, the supernaturally endowed **Samjaya** narrates to the blind king what has happened to Arjuna and Krishna and the *Divine* Truth exposed by the latter. First, both **Samjaya** and Krishna are charioteers to their respective masters; and in both cases we deal in 'charioteer' with an almost universal mythological *metaphor of soul*, for it is the Divine Soul that conveys its wisdom through the supernatural capacity of the charioteer **Samjaya** to Dhritarashtra afflicted by blindness, in the first

case, and it is the same Divine Soul (the Soul of all Souls) that conveys its wisdom through a miraculous (supernatural?) apparition of Krishna the man (charioteer) to Arjuna affected by despondency, in the second. In both cases, by way of a mythological metaphor, the men to whom the Divine Wisdom is conveyed are bodies; for bodies represent 'ordinariness' and 'non-soul' here. Moreover, this situation introduces that which is above supernatural knowledge hierarchically, that is, soul (self) or the Soul (Self) of the Universe, so that supernatural knowledge itself becomes a 'middle term' mediating between the natural (knowledge) and its Divine counterpart, the Absolute. And it is here that we have to return to the triad; the natural/the supernatural/the transcendental (see Lecture Two, 3, A, §4)

§9

*The Teaching of Ātman: both the teaching and ātman
are transcendental*

The situation, so far described, is not yet (or 'has not yet become') mythological *a fortiori*, but possesses a 'mythological charge' though not yet activated. [It finds striking parallels in very many folklores and mythologies, the famous *Babylonian Conversation of a man with his slave (charioteer)* is one of them. A nobleman is driven by his slave-charioteer from place to place only to be persuaded of the total illusoriness and vanity of all his wishes and aspirations—in this case the charioteer figures as a metaphor (or an objectification) of the nobleman's soul.] And it is in the context of the *Teaching of Self* (or soul, *ātman*) in the Bhagavadgita, with its new, triple hierarchy, that such special 'atomary' points or circumstances as the blindness of **Samjaya**, despondency of Arjuna, etc., combine to form extra-ordinary events and trigger fully-fledged mythological situations. *Ātman* in **IV**—and this is the crucial point of the whole Teaching—is not the man, not an agent or actor, nor is it subject to Fate (or Karma), but remains the passive unaffected (even if the man is active, or lustful, or enraged) witness of what happens within or around the man (the body?). As such, *ātman* cannot be changed by any power, natural or supernatural. Its knowledge, also unchanging as it is, is neither natural nor supernatural. And if in **III** we see an intimation that supernatural knowledge can be achieved through ascetic exploits or purity of intention, the Knowledge of Ātman is what it is, and it may even be suggested that the chances of gaining it for an ascetic and a layman, or for a mundane ignoramus and the most learned brahman are, in

principle, equal. That is probably why the Teaching of *Ātman* was communicated by Krishna to an ordinary person, Arjuna. For, one may guess, for a man to fulfil and realise the central 'practical' goal of that teaching—that is, to become totally disinterested in all his actions, words, and thoughts—would be tantamount to becoming his self (soul).

§10

The middle (or centre) as the metaphor of Witness

Driving the chariot to the middle of the battle-field, while being extraordinary in a 'natural' sense—for only the great leader of men could have placed himself between the two armies to see the 'final parade', so to speak—has, at the same time, a Divine meaning which Arjuna could not know himself, but which Krishna the Lord knew, to wit: being at the centre is a 'natural' position of the 'Absolute Witness or Observer of the Field' (Kshetra, the Universe or Micro-Universe, i.e., the body). For those who do not *yet* know that, this is a typical mythological place where 'everything may happen'. In our case, what happens is a meeting with God (hitherto vaguely or half-recognized in Arjuna's distant cousin and close friend) of whose Divine Knowledge the leader of men is going to partake of an infinitesimal fragment allotted to him, and this is the 'natural' place for such a partaking.

6

A PRINCE AND A GIRL: STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS A PLOT-FORMING FACTOR IN MYTHS

§1

State of consciousness as complementary to knowledge in the act of mythic transformation: it is supernatural knowledge that knows all states of consciousness

In the previous episode from the Mahabharata (**III**), the central extraordinary event which assumes its mythological meaning is, of course, the king's shooting an arrow into the buck at the moment of mating. This deserves the special attention of the mythologist, for it gives an even clearer example of the extra-ordinary serving as a 'prop' for constructing mythological situations.

With respect to both **III** and **IV** a phenomenological observation ought to be made. Namely, that in the episode of hunting (**III. I.1**) the buck's mating, though it is in normal circumstances—i.e., with *normal* men and deer who are not ascetics—seen as eminently natural, as 'the limit of naturalness', so to speak, and thereby as an act of the least possible degree of self-awareness wherein men are as unconscious as deer, this same mating in the case of great ascetics may be seen as an act of self-awareness and knowledge.

Only those endowed with supernatural knowledge have the ability not only to transform themselves into deer or other beings, but to be fully *conscious* of themselves at the moment of orgasm (or of death?). I call this 'observation' phenomenological because knowledge here is that which a person himself is conscious of as a *transforming factor*, and because it is 'being conscious of', that corresponds to that knowledge as its *condition*, or *state* (state of consciousness), *complementary to knowledge in its description* both by the text itself and by the external observer.

All this is not to say, however, that in **III** the ascetic Kindama was really aware of himself as Kindama while mating as a buck with his doe. For what we conventionally call here 'states of consciousness'—such, for instance, as the passion of Kindama or despondency of Arjuna—are given to us in a text, if given at all, only in their conjunction with knowledge without which they cannot figure as events. Thus, if an outside onlooker wishes to describe them as events *already* described in the text he would have to concede to them, these states of consciousness, natural as they are, the rank and status of a sort of by-product or side-result of somebody's (but not his own) *supernatural knowledge*. For only by and from the point of view of a supernatural knowledge which *knows* these states and knows how to transform them could the very idea of their naturalness even have appeared in the texts.

§2

Yoga as a manifestation of supernatural knowledge of states of consciousness

Moreover, the cultivation of these states, which assumes its technical manifestation and theory in *yoga* (understood in a broad sense), clearly shows that any natural state of consciousness, such as lust, anger, sloth, or excitement can be described as natural only on the basis of its transformation into something non- or a-natural *already produced* by a yogic (supernatural) knowledge. And it is, in this connection, not at all

surprising that it is mostly ‘non-conscious’ states of consciousness, such as those occurring at the time of orgasm, dying, sleep, etc., that become, as in the case of largely esoteric tantrist practices (and their respective theories), the preferred objects of such a transformation. In this case knowledge discovers itself as supernatural by making a most natural event supernatural. Although an ordinary man in **III** or **IV** might well know that any interruption of sexual intercourse is prohibited (or tabooed) for natural reasons, those endowed with supernatural knowledge knew these very reasons to be supernatural. To wit: that killing at such a moment would inevitably entail a total ‘karmic disturbance’ of the victim after his death, and the gravest karmic consequences for the killer after, or even before, his death.

§3.

The appropriateness of Kindama’s curse

That is why, when the ascetic Kindama cursed Pandu and forbade him to make love under the threat of immediate death, not only did he give vent to his natural anger but saved the king from another and much graver retribution by punishing him only for breaking one taboo. And punish him he did by an, as it were, ‘ascetic punishment’ of sexual abstention. [In this case a kind of ‘mythological’ substitution could be seen in that Kindama, while dying at the moment of orgasm, made the king an ascetic by his curse.]

§4

The mythological as situated at the intersection of natural events with supernatural meanings

The state of Arjuna’s despondency in **IV** corresponds to Pandu’s hunting rage in **III** as instances of the nescience of the supernatural. Although in **III** it is, if only implicitly, a karmic impulse that inevitably drove the poor king to shoot an arrow at the mating couple, and in **IV** it is the Divine Dharmic Charioteer that drove Arjuna’s chariot to the centre of the battle-field, both are mythological points, the points whose ambivalence—as *natural* events with supernatural meanings—is determined by two different knowledges; and this means that what we call ‘the mythological’ in the sense of mediating between the two and generating situations in life and plots in texts, is marked by the protagonists of such situations and texts as extra-ordinary and significant, that is, worthy of tale and recollection. But then a most interesting

question arises: can there be situations, events, plots, etc., which, though marked by their mythological extra-ordinariness, lack their context of supernatural knowledge, and can we from their mythological character deduce such a context as existing under the 'surface' of texts, or preceding them in time, or both?

§5

*The myth as 'pure non-consciousness'; Bahram Gur
and Azada*

The answer would of course, be yes. But prior to embarking on a phenomenon which I, for convention's sake only, will style 'the myth as pure non-consciousness'—note, not 'sub-' but 'non-'—will give, as an example of such a phenomenon, an episode taken from a text much later than the Mahabharata, the Persian epic *Shah-Nama*:

V. Bahram Gur and Azada

1. Polo and the hunting-ground now were Bahram's sole occupations. It happened one day that he went out hunting accompanied by the lyre-player and without his retinue. The Greek girl's name was Azada and the colour of her cheeks was that of coral. She was the solace of his heart and she shared all his tastes. Her name was ever on his lips. One day when he went hunting he had asked for a racing-camel, the back of which he adorned with brocade. From the saddle four stirrups hung down and the twain galloped together over hill and dale. Under his quiver the gallant Bahram had a bow with which to cast pebbles, he being proficient in every kind [of skill]. Suddenly there came running towards them two pairs of gazelles, and the young man smilingly said to Azada,

2. 'My pretty one, when I string the bow and put the knot in my thumbstall, which gazelle do you wish to see shot? The female is young and her mate very old.'

Azada gave answer,

'My lion-hearted prince, men of war do not go in chase of gazelles. Convert yonder doe into a buck with your arrow and with another arrow let the old buck become a doe. Then spur the camel on to a short trot as the gazelles try to escape your arrow. Shoot a pebble at the ear of one so that it will lay its head down on its shoulder. The pebble will cause the creature to scratch its ear and for the purpose it will bring its hind leg up to its shoulder. Then, with your arrow, pin head, foot and back together, if you would like me to call you the most brilliant [archer] in the world.'

3. Bahram Gur strung his bow and raised a shout in that silent waste. In this quiver he had an arrow with two heads, which he kept for

hunting on the plain. As soon as the gazelles were in flight the prince shot away the horns on the head of the fleeting buck, using the arrow with the double head whereat the girl was filled with amazement. The buck's head being shorn of its black horns at once came to look like a doe. Then the hunter shot two arrows at the doe's head at the places where horns might grow. Instead of horns there were now two arrows, the doe's blood reddening its breast. Now he urged the camel towards the other pair while he placed two pebbles in the bow. One he shot into the ear of one of the gazelles, greatly to his pleasure, for which he had reason, seeing that the gazelle immediately scratched its ear. At that moment he fixed an arrow into his bow and with it pinned together the creature's head, ear and hind leg. Azada's heart burned with grief for the gazelle, and Bahram said to her,

4. 'How is it, my pretty one, that you release such a stream of tears from your eyes?'

'This is not a humane deed,' she replied. 'You are no man; you have the spirit of a demon.'

5. Vaguely recollecting a saying of yore Bahram dashed her from the saddle headlong to the ground and drove the camel over her, bespattering her head, her breast and her arms and the lyre with her blood.

'You silly lyre player,' he called out to her. 'Why did you try thus to ensnare me? If my aim when I shot had gone astray it would have brought disgrace to my birth.'

The girl died beneath the camel's feet and never again did he take a girl with him when hunting.

[*Shah-Nama, the Epic of the Kings*, trans. by Reuben Levy, revised by Amin Banani, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1967, p. 299–300.]

§6

*A commentary: a symmetry between III and V with
the non-conscious as its axis*

The episode presents a situation ideally symmetrical to that of the first episode in the Mahabharata (III).

In III the king sends five arrows at two mating deer—while in V the prince sends three arrows at two deer; in V the change of sex (or 'exchange' of sexes, shall we say) is directly symmetrical to the sexual intercourse (also an 'exchange' of sorts) in III.

In **III** the rishi—buck is in a state of non-consciousness (in the sense adopted in our hermeneutical procedure) ‘naturally’ inherent in the moment of orgasm—while in **IV** the prince-hunter is in a state of erotic excitement, riding on a camel with the young Rumi concubine sitting on his lap. [This is a case of perfect reverse symmetry.]

In **III** the rishi, coming out of his state of non-consciousness, curses the king with abstinence—while in **V** the prince, coming out of his state of erotic excitement, throws his concubine under the hooves of the camel. [A case of reverse symmetry again.]

In both shooting an arrow at the mating deer and change of sex we can observe the same *extra-ordinariness* which, in its relation to *the non-conscious*, configures the whole content of these two plots and makes them mythological.

The supernatural knowledge of the rishi, which was *latent* at the non-conscious moment of his orgasm and which some time before had transformed him and his wife into two deer, is symmetrical to the traditional knowledge of lore (also, in a way supernatural in its source) *forgotten* by the Persian prince at the moment of his sexual excitement. Because, and this is of immense mythological importance, it is that oblivion that released his extra-ordinary skill of archery and, thereby, triggered the plot, so to speak. And it is his recollection of ‘what had been said by the wizards of yore’ that clinched the episode and brought it to the endspiel.

And, finally, we have a striking symmetry in the ways in which both episodes are resolved. In **III** the great ascetic’s curse binds the chance hunter to life-long sexual abstention making him, thereby, a kind of ascetic too. In **V** the enraged prince binds himself to an, at least, temporary sexual abstention by killing the object of his sexual desire. It is interesting to note that the main difference between these two episodes is that in the first, sexual abstention is entirely *internal* (i.e., ‘inner ascetism’), whereas in the second, we deal with a merely *external* elimination of the object of desire. [This may suggest a difference between not only Iranian and Indian mythology, but also between the patterns of their ascetic practice.]

The pure non-consciousness in **III** marked by the great rishi’s orgasm, as well as the confused consciousness of the Persian Prince, marked by his lust and hunting rage, directly correspond, or are, as it were, opposed to two different knowledges, in combination with which they create a kind of line of tension along which mythological situations happen, and mythological plots are formed and developed. Or putting it slightly differently and in a more general way, the state of non-consciousness

(or confused consciousness) and supernatural (or ordinary) knowledge are two poles, so to speak, between which extra-ordinary events take place and mythological situations are crystallized.

§7

*A parallel between 'knowledge/nescience' and
'consciousness/non-consciousness'*

An analysis of these myths in terms of a field of tension between knowledge and nescience, between consciousness and suspension of consciousness, is not, however, complete. The simplest comparison of the two episodes reveals a further opposition, working simultaneously with the first: that between supernatural knowledge (such as the traditional knowledge of lore) at one pole, and ordinary knowledge (including ordinary ignorance) at the other. It is in the field or space created by these two lines of tension that the whole myth finds its realization and becomes, as it were, exposed in all its structural complexity to the perception of the narrator and his listener or reader. (And often to the perception of the mythical personages too.)

§8

Scheme of symmetry of III and V

The following scheme may be helpful to our *hermeneutical* understanding of these two episodes, i.e., III and V, as mythological. (see opposite)

§9

*Non-consciousness, when knowledge is forgotten or
suspended, as critical in mythological situations*

The notion of 'non-conscious' (S_0) is used here only and exclusively as a means applied to the content of concrete texts seen by the investigator as mythological in his hermeneutical exegesis. In this sense 'non-conscious' designates a situation where *a personage in a textual episode (whether oral or written), who is central to this episode, is unconscious of himself as the agent (doer, speaker, thinker) at the time (sometimes at the moment) of this episode, and/or unconscious of himself as the agent (etc.) in the previous episode or episodes.* This non-consciousness is not the same thing as non-knowledge. Knowledge may or may not be forgotten, while supernatural knowledge once gotten cannot be

forgotten, for such are the rules of the game. It may be thought by the narrator of the episode or by the investigator, that one's knowledge, at the time (or at the moment) of unconsciousness, is in fact forgotten, for it was acquired in previous episodes of one's life, awareness of which is lost together with awareness of that knowledge. At the same time, it may be supposed, in the case of one's supernatural knowledge, that even at the moment of unconsciousness it remains in one as a kind of latent *objective* fact, although not manifested as subjective awareness owing to the exigencies of the situation. In both cases however, i.e., in the cases of both knowledge and supernatural knowledge, it is that non-consciousness which allows the whole mythological situation to happen.

We might conjecture, in this connection, that the great ascetic of **III**, while making love to his wife *as a buck*, was not conscious of being transformed into a buck due to his temporary state of unconsciousness at the moment of orgasm, although this transformation was effected by means of his super-knowledge which remained there, as it were, suspended or latent. Then, when his copulation was stopped by the arrows meant to kill him and his mate, he returned to his usual state of mind and put the curse of abstinence on the impious king whose non-knowledge (and confused consciousness) drove him to breach the taboo on killing living beings at the moment of copulation. Given, of course, that the king's lack of supernatural knowledge did not let him see the great ascetic and his wife in a buck and his mate.

§10

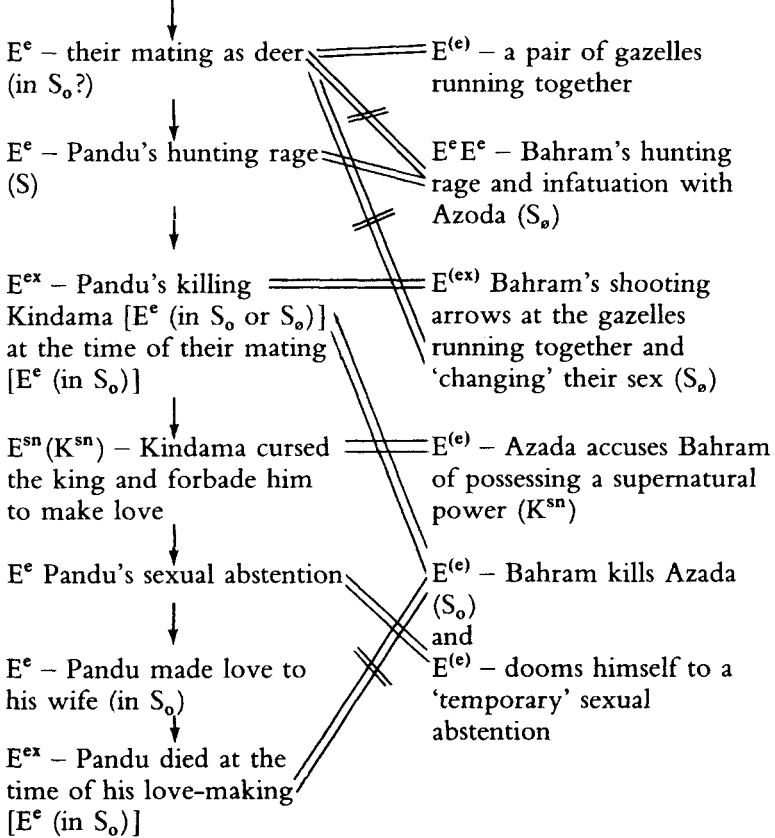
Copulation mythologically manifests the 'non-conscious', and orgasm is mythologically symmetrical with death

In another episode from the Mahabharata, another great rishi, Agastya, was making love to a queen of the Bharatas who was pregnant. When the prince in her womb reproached him for *wasting his semen*, Agastya also cursed him with blindness though, in this case, for interrupting his love-making before he reached orgasm. Here both Agastya and the unborn prince possessed super-knowledge and Agastya did not become unconscious in *one* sense. In both cases, however, copulation retains its mythological meaning of manifesting the 'non-conscious', and the moment of orgasm remains mythologically again symmetrical with death by sharing with it that very state of non-consciousness. That is why, in almost all Indian conceptions of reincarnation or metempsychosis

III

V

$E^{sn}(K^{sn})$ – transformation
of Kindama and his wife
into deer



K	– knowledge	S_o	– state of non-consciousness
K^{sn}	– supernatural knowledge	S_o	– state of confused consciousness
E	– event		
E^e	– especial (atomary) event		
E^{ex}	– extra-ordinary (complex) event	=	symmetry
E^{sn}	– supernatural event		
S	– state of consciousness	*	reverse symmetry

it is the moment of one's entering the 'new womb' that is regarded as the moment of total oblivion of one's previous life, in a way 'equal' to the state of non-consciousness of one's future parents at the moment of one's conception. [And that is why, in some of the Indian and particularly Buddhist tantras we have a strong tendency to eliminate that 'non-conscious' state or phase altogether by remaining yogically concentrated (*samādhi*) at the time of death, and absolutely conscious of one's self at the time of sexual intercourse (in the last case by 'withdrawing the semen' and preventing orgasm). This is also echoed in the Buddhist practice of transcendental *samāpatti*, where all thoughts previous to this yogic state are suspended.]

§11

*Two aspects of non-consciousness: the non-conscious
as homogenous and unstructured, and as
heterogenous and complex; state of consciousness
versus structure of consciousness*

Thus introduced, the non-conscious is present to the mythologist in its 'psychological' as it were, aspect, that is, as a *state of consciousness* which can be conceived by us only psychologically and, thereby, as devoid of any describable content and, phenomenologically speaking, as simple, homogenous and unstructured, serving more as an indication or reference to, than description of, an event or fact in a text. There is, however, another aspect to the non-conscious in which it assumes its mythological significance and inner complexity. Taken in this second aspect, it not only represents an element or a feature of very many myths and mythological plots, but becomes in itself complex, heterogenous and structured, acquiring its own content and representing, in its relation to states of consciousness, that of a '*structure*' of consciousness. This is so in the sense that various *different* events can happen only in the presence of the non-conscious, and that it is the non-conscious that, as it were, 'attracts' these events and makes them configure in certain patterns which determine the very typology of myth. In such a well-trodden case as the story of King Oedipus (see II in Lecture Three), it is his rage that made him kill a wanderer and his lust, or lust for power, that made him marry a Queen, and not only nescience of the fact that the first was his father and the second his mother. Considering the fact that Oedipus was, though indirectly, warned to this effect by the Oracle, his rage and lust can be regarded as *psychologically*, in a most elementary sense of the word,

analogous to the first or 'psychological' aspect of non-consciousness in myth (though in the latter case the word 'psychological' is used as a metaphor for a state of consciousness specific to mythological situations).

§12

The non-conscious and the extra-ordinary; the extra-ordinary as a preserve of an élite of protagonists, and not as a universal psychological property

But if we look at the parricide and the incest in Oedipus' story in the sense of the second aspect of non-consciousness, as outlined in the previous paragraph, i.e., as something describable which structures the content of a mythological situation, then we have to resort again to the idea of 'extra-ordinary'. As treated by us previously, the 'extra-ordinary' denotes that which is situated, as it were, between the natural and supernatural in relation to personages involved in mythological situations. Thus there are situations which happen not to everybody but only to those exceptional few who, though not being themselves supernatural (gods, etc.), or even unique (buddhas, etc.), can behave in a way the others cannot. Or, speaking of some concrete and particular cases of the extra-ordinary, it can be said that, though not being 'supernatural' beings by a formal definition, they are allowed to breach taboos (which others are not), or even perhaps meant to breach them by some 'exceptional' rules applied only to their 'class', so to speak. All this, given that these extra-ordinary beings may or may not have known of their 'extra-ordinariness', as for instance, a person who aspired to become the Nemean Priest in Frazer's *Golden Bough*, knew that he had to kill his predecessor, whereas Oedipus, though he *knew* that he had to kill his father, *did not know* whom he killed. In the latter case, it might be supposed—and mythical texts provide ample evidence for it—that very often it is the extra-ordinary things that happen to one that put one into the category of extra-ordinary beings, revealing one's exclusiveness, so to speak, to oneself as well as to other people in the text, and to the narrator and the investigator. Thus, in the case of Oedipus, this second, 'non-psychological', so to speak, aspect of the non-conscious can be interpreted in our hermeneutical procedure as reflecting the ritual incest of the kings and the ritual parricide of the king-priests in Mediterranean Semitic-Hamitic myths and their Greek and Roman derivations. Therefore, instead of Freud's deduction of Oedipus' parricide and incest to *general* and *universal* instinctive

tendencies, a hermeneutical approach might see parricide and incest in a myth as two elements of a structure of consciousness conventionally called 'extra-ordinary'. Extra-ordinary, because it remains a preserve of priests, kings (who often possessed priestly and magical functions) and ascetics, and not because it is a psychological property assigned to and stored in the unconscious of all humankind.⁸

§13

*The 'objective' meaning of the non-conscious; the
idea of absolutely 'non-conscious object' as a
mythological postulate*

If I were to try and imagine—for it can only be a work of the imagination—the non-conscious as 'objectively' existing, I would not construe it as something lying dormant in the depth of our psyche, as when we say that 'our death wish is unconscious.' On the contrary, if it were possible to naturalize it, i.e., to posit it as a 'thing of nature', I would place it not *into* human mentality, but outside it as a complementary element in a certain type of human situation, which it 'objectively' makes possible. Although, given of course that in a concrete situation, its presence as an objective element can be inferred only retrospectively or by hindsight.

Within the framework of our hermeneutical approach, however, the notion of the non-conscious figures only when correlated with the notion of knowledge, and as secondary to and derivative from the latter. To put it simply, *there must be something that does not know, and does not know itself* in the first place. You cannot call anything mythology without postulating that.

Though postulated in terms of knowledge, the non-conscious can be used by the investigator as a position or a point of view from which the whole situation in question is perceived *as* mythological. That is, one and the same situation can, in principle at least, be observed from the point of view of knowledge as well as from that of the non-conscious, provided, of course, that both of them (or their analogues) are described in the text as elements of this situation. At the same time, it follows from our previous considerations concerning the non-conscious that not only

⁸ In fact the extra-ordinary is that which is assigned to a certain class of *protagonists*. This consideration was communicated to me by Professor Igor Smirnov from the University of Konstanz.

is the non-conscious an objective element of a mythological situation, but it makes the latter objective. That is, it is the non-conscious that makes this situation an *object* which cannot be conscious of itself by definition. And this consideration would, in its turn, suggest the inevitability of a myth (text, content and plot) wherein the protagonist is such an absolutely non-conscious object. Unfortunately for professional mythologists, the so-called '*archaic symbols*' *simply do not exist without or outside their interpretations by those who use them—there can be no such existence; the same with myths*. Unfortunately, because such an interpretation, if unknown to the mythologist, cannot be reconstructed by him from myth, if it does not contain it, in the first place. And if the interpretation is known to the mythologist it would unavoidably limit him in his own interpretation, in the second. The postulate of the non-conscious is offered here as an extrapolation. Our idea of the non-conscious is an etic one and seldom coincides with what myth says of itself, but it may be useful as an angle or a point of departure in our observation of myths which show a tendency to discriminate between thought (or intention) and their object. A tendency which on the one hand would find its limit in the idea of *mere object*, and on the other would result in the idea of *gradation* or *hierarchy* in thought, mind, and consciousness.

LECTURE FIVE

Myth as Time, Event, and Person

(*A return of Indra; the end of an endless day*)

Time, like an ever-rolling
stream, bears all its sons away.

Isaac Watts

Arjuna (to Vishnu as Time):
“You are greedily licking
your lips to devour these
worlds entire with your
flickering mouths...” The
Lord: “I am time grown old
to destroy the world,
embarked on the course of
world annihilation: except
for yourself none of these
will survive...”

The Bhagavadgita

1

A BOY AND A WITCH: TIME OF KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF TIME

§1

*The narrator's introduction and the
difference in times*

We turn now to two other notions, *time* (T) and *event* (E) which, in terms of our hermeneutical procedure of understanding myth, also figure in their relation to knowledge (K); the last being the phenomenological basis to which they can, if necessary, be reduced. Let us take as an

example the beginning of a simple Celtic fairy-tale. The narrator introduces the tale to the reader, saying:

VI.1. 'It was a time when there were still some people who knew how to change themselves or others into different men, or beasts of prey, or birds, or plants of the field, without invoking God's wrath upon their heads...'

First, we have here, three different times: T_1 —a time when some people knew how to change themselves, etc., that is, the time to which the narrator refers as definitely prior to his own time; T_2 —the time of narration; T_3 —the time of the investigator's (i.e., my own, in this particular case) hermeneutical procedure. [T_3 , unlike T_1 and T_2 , is, as it were, 'open', because such a hermeneutical procedure may be repeated indefinitely by other investigators in their own 'times' ($T_3^{(2)}$, $T_3^{(3)}$, etc.) with or without referring to me or to one another. Whereas T_1 and T_2 will remain 'fixed', so to speak, the second within the content of the text narrated and the first within the texts of events narrated (i.e., within the plot).]

§2

The three knowledges; the idea of 'historical' time

Second, we have three different *knowledges* here: K_1 —the knowledge of wizards (or witches), i.e., the knowledge of how to change themselves, etc.; K_2 —the knowledge of the narrator, i.e., his knowledge of the *event* of K_1 , as well as of the event or fact of God's wrath, which the wizards of old were spared and of which the narrator himself or any of *his* contemporaries would never have been spared if they had tried to possess and practise K_1 ; K_3 —the knowledge of the investigator, i.e., my own knowledge of the fact of K_1 as a *mythical* event, and of the fact of K_2 as an instance of the understanding (and not only knowledge) of K_1 in the light of God's Will in the New Dispensation.

The mention of the New Dispensation has brought us to a consideration about time as it is thought of without any connection with, or relation to, knowledge. In this particular case, it is the time comprising the intervals between T_1 and T_2 and T_2 and T_3 , the knowledge of which is not described in the text, or simply speaking,

historical time. Historical time is not subject to hermeneutical procedure, being a *concept* of a discipline external to mythology; unless, of course it is approached as a special mythological concept (T_m). To T_m we will return a little later.¹

§3.

*'Mythological' as different in time and knowledge:
what determines what?—time and knowledge as two
points of view*

Third, the narrator's introduction is a general statement about the situation which *we* are going to investigate *as* mythological. He, himself, characterizes this situation as *different* from his own. In what way is it different? The answer to this question is relevant to our understanding of the introduction. It is different in time and knowledge.² For changing oneself into an animal, etc. (as in the case of the great Rishi changing himself and his wife into deer) can, if we follow the narrator literally, be explained in two ways, namely: either that we have a special *time* (here T_1) when such a transformation was possible, i.e., *it is time which determines the possibility of supernatural knowledge of how to transform oneself into an animal etc.* (K_1^{sn}),—or *it is supernatural knowledge that determines the character of time*. [That is, either $(K)T_1 \rightarrow K_1$, or $K_1 \rightarrow T_1$. 'K' is in brackets here because *we* (not the narrator!) have already made the *general* statement that time is derivative from and secondary to knowledge, at least as far as our hermeneutical procedure goes.] Thus we can posit time and knowledge here as two points of view from which the narrator might have seen the miraculous transformations of Celtic wizards and, at the same time, as two possible points of departure in our understanding of a broader

¹ Here it is enough to say that *mythological time* (T_m) is understood by us as an element of the content of a myth, i.e., as that which the protagonists of a myth *know* in its structural complexity, as a structure of consciousness. In this connection we may refer to **III.2.2.** where the king 'crazed by Time, succumbed to the Law of Time', and to **IV.2.** where the Lord says, 'I am Time grown old to destroy the world', etc.

² It is, of course, different from the point of view of the external observer too. So, for instance, though **Samjaya**, the narrator of **IV**, perceived the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna synchronously, his account of it was told ten days after the event.

mythological context into which not only the wizards but the narrator too will be included.

§4

Time of knowledge and knowledge of time; inner or mythological time

This will bring us, in our hermeneutical procedure, to a point where we have to leave the framework of narration and pass to the narrated situations or events themselves. In other words, we have to suspend our knowledge (K_3) of the knowledge of the narrator (K_2) as well as his knowledge of the knowledge of wizards (K_2^{Sn}) and of the time when the wizards lived and knew (T_1). For even this time (T_1), 'mythological' as it is, remains in the narrator's introduction as general and external to the time within which the concrete mythological situations based on supernatural knowledge take place. Because here the narrator's (and our) *knowledge of time* will inevitably be different from, or even opposed to, the *time of knowledge within* these situations. The latter, though from the narrator's point of view coinciding with T_1 , will have to be considered as a special *inner* or *mythological* time (T_m).

§5

Mythological time and ordinary time in the Bhagavadgita

It is the inner mythological time which is uniquely singled out as a mythological phenomenon in its own right in **IV** through the *triple narration* (see the scheme in Lecture Four) in the text of the Bhagavadgita. So let us recapitulate the scheme of **IV** from the vertex of time, so to speak.

The narrator of the whole Mahabharata, Vaishampayana, narrates the story (narration A) narrated by **Samjaya** (narration B), which includes the Divine Teaching narrated by Krishna (narration C). The most interesting point here is that the exposition of the Divine Teaching by the God Krishna, i.e., the Bhagavad-gita proper, lasted, as narrated in B, only a few moments, while its actual Sanskrit text amounts to some 65 modern printed pages which, in the most rapid imaginable reading aloud, would take at least 2 hours of our *ordinary time*. Supposing that **Samjaya's** perception of the exposition was supernatural (K_2^{Sn}), we may conjecture that the time of *his* narration (T_2^B) to Dhritarashtra was equal to and synchronous with the time of Krishna's exposition:

$T_1^C = T_1^B$. Whereas to other personages involved in **IV** with their ordinary knowledge (K_1), as well as to Vaishampayana, had he reckoned it, and to me as an external observer, had I witnessed the whole scene, it must have lasted for only a few moments which would never have allowed us to apprehend the whole text.³

Well, let us explain this as we may. S.P.Radhakrishnan, for one, thinks that ‘Time was stopped when Krishna spoke’ (*Indian Philosophy*, vol 1, chapter on the Bhagavadgita). My surmise is that the time of Krishna’s exposition differs, not in its external duration, but in its inner capacity as a container of events. Supernatural knowledge here can be said to *contain* time which happens *within* it, and time in turn to contain inside itself a series of events which, if seen from outside, may last only for a moment but, seen from inside, may last hours or days—or vice versa. (Mythological time here is analogous to dream time in which a complex series of events can unfold in what, externally speaking, amounts to a few seconds.)⁴

§6

The phenomenon of narration and time

We may, in this connection, suppose the *phenomenon*—not the fact, for a fact does not imply any knowledge or awareness of itself—of narration to be (though not necessarily to have been in historical retrospective) a *time-forming factor* within a text. It is one’s awareness of the mere fact of one’s narration (or its perception by the hearers or readers) as different in *space* from the fact of the event narrated, that generates the idea of their difference in time, not *vice versa*. Thus we can say that the idea of Time appears as the idea of *different times*; and then an idea of one unilinear time stretching from the past through the present to the future can be seen as secondary to or derivative (but again, not necessarily ‘historically’) from the idea of several different times which, in its turn, descends from the idea of the coexistence or synchronicity of different places within the space of narration. At the same time, it is essential to note that in narration we have a special type

³ All this, of course, is a sheer conjecture tenable only provided that $T_2^C = T_2^B$.

⁴ We can perhaps conjecture that ultimately time here can be dissolved into event—at one moment Krishna’s exposition was not there, at the next it was there—and that only the narrative structure of myth requires the introduction of the passing of time.

of textual intentionality different from that of the text narrated and from that of the content within that text. It is that intentionality in which *Epic* as a genre differs from the genre of *sacred hymns* even if the latter includes in itself some elements of the former.

§7

*The plot of VI: the boy Gurion is reborn as Taliesin.
Taliesin is the name of supernatural knowledge*

There are cases when mythological time may alternate with the time of the whole episode, story, or plot (i.e., T_1), but only provided that the knowledge in question, i.e., the supernatural knowledge (K_1^{sn}), persists through all transformations of a 'person', irrespective of whether or not that 'person' is conscious of it or of 'his' own transformations. So we read in the Welsh story of Taliesin:

VI.2. 'The witch Ceridwen prepares in her cauldron a magic brew which, after a year's boiling, will yield three blessed drops. Whoever swallows them will *know* all the secrets of the past, the present, and the future, and she intends them for her ugly son Mofran. The drops fly out of the cauldron and fall on the finger of Gurion, the boy who helped to tend the fire underneath the cauldron. He puts his finger in his mouth, and then, realising the danger, flees. Ceridwen sets out in pursuit. Gurion transforms himself successively into a hare, a fish, a bird, and a grain of wheat. She gives chase in appropriate forms—a greyhound, an otter bitch, a hawk and a hen. In the last form she swallows the grain of wheat, and in the fullness of time, Gurion is reborn of her as the wizard bard Taliesin.'

§8

A commentary: Taliesin as a transcendental being

To this very abbreviated version of the plot the authors of the book [A.Rees and B.Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976 (1961), pp. 29–30] add a general mythological commentary which, according to the scheme presented above, I identify with the knowledge of the investigator of myths, K_3^1 (in which case my own understanding of the whole passage will figure as K_3^2):⁵

⁵ 1 and 2 here represent respectively the 1st commentator and the one who comments on him: in this case myself.

VI.3. ‘While individual beings in some of these stories retain their identities through diverse incarnations, the child Taliesin, in a poem, replying to the King’s question as to who he is and whence he has come, envisages himself as an ubiquitous presence which has witnessed the history of the world and will endure to the end. The blessed drops did no more than make him aware that he was there when it all happened.’

§9

*My sub-commentary: knowledge and consciousness
of self are two different things; knowledge of
transformation*

Thus, the narrator here knows (K_2) Taliesin as the wizard-bard endowed with supernatural knowledge (K_1^{sn}) condensed during the time of being boiled (T_m) into the ‘drops of knowledge’ (K_1^2) which made him *aware* of himself as an (or the?) ‘eternal being’. At the same time, it is this very supernatural knowledge which, being itself a supernatural power, enabled him to pass through all these transformations. But—and this is a very important mythological point which we have already touched upon above—just as before swallowing the ‘drops of knowledge’ the child was not aware of himself as existing from eternity, so after swallowing them he was not aware of himself as the boy Gurion while he passed through these transformations (being in S_0). For here, as in our previous examples, we are given to understand that, though interconnected, knowledge and self-consciousness are two different things and that, very often, the state of non-consciousness acts as the ground from which supernatural knowledge emerges to be converted into the supernatural power of transformation into animals, plants, etc. To put it in a more metaphorical way, it might be said that the supernatural *knowledge of transformation* here is suspended at the time when the transformation itself takes place.

§10

*Knowledge as the primary factor and
self-consciousness as the secondary one; ‘oneself’ as
a variable*

But of course, it is the fact that one’s knowledge and one’s awareness of oneself stand, in this passage, as two factors—the former primary and the latter derivative from the former—which produce that strange ‘mythological (and metaphysical too) variable’ which is called

‘oneself’. ‘Oneself’ means that which is conscious of itself at a previous state or states and of itself at the present state, as being the same *conscious* self. [In some mythologies ‘state’ may refer to ‘life’, ‘rebirth’, or ‘reincarnation’.] So, in the final analysis, it is normal or ‘natural’ knowledge that determines one’s identity as ‘the same’ in various previous states of one’s present life, and it is supernatural knowledge that determines one’s identity as ‘the same’ in various previous states of existence—lives, forms, or bodies. Thus, mythologically speaking, ‘oneself’ is a mere function of one’s knowledge acting through states of consciousness (those of non-consciousness included).

§11

A knowledge of an event and an event of knowledge

When Taliesin says (id., p. 330):

VI.4. ‘I have been teacher to all Christendom, I shall be on the face of the earth until Doom. And it is not known, what my flesh is, whether flesh or fish,’

it echoes Krishna’s revelation of himself in the Bhagavadgita as existing at all times and in all universes, manifesting himself in various forms, divine, human, animal, etc. albeit, of course, it is *not* unknown to him what *his* ‘flesh’ was, for it was created by his Divine Power of Illusion (*Māyā*). [It might be supposed, however, that it is those *drops* swallowed by the prodigious boy that *are* Taliesin, as the concentrate of the eternal unchanged transcendental knowledge, supernaturally transmitted from one changing body to another to assume its self-awareness and manifest personness in Taliesin the bard.]

It is in connection with the last passage that we are confronted, once again, with a situation when knowledge (K_1) is displayed in an abstract way; that is, when it is not related to or expressed as (or, again, ‘transformed into’) supernatural changes. For here, Taliesin, answering the King’s question, ‘Whence art thou come and whereto wilt thou go?’ communicates to him a general idea, a kind of ‘resultant’ knowledge not related specifically to any mythological event (in our sense). Or, more exactly, as a supernatural knowledge, the communication of which is in itself an event (E^{Sn}). In this case, as in many others, we deal with an *event of knowledge* as opposed, so to speak, to *knowledge of an event* in a mythological situation. [So, for instance, the *whole content* of the *Bhagavadgita* can be treated as the event of Krishna’s communication of his knowledge to Arjuna, re-told by **Samjaya** to King Dhritarashtra.]

§12

Situation and event in terms of knowledge; situation as a mythological abstraction

The difference between the notions ‘situation’ and ‘event’ in our hermeneutical understanding of mythology is, again, based on the difference between the two knowledges underlying these notions. For ‘event’ (E) is primarily derived from the knowledge *within* a given mythological situation (S_m), or ‘knowledge of an event’— K_1 or/and $K_2 \rightarrow E$, whereas ‘situation’ is constrained by the knowledge of the hermeneuticist himself— $K_3 \rightarrow S$. For it is he who chooses the text for his understanding and determines, by way of its quite arbitrary segmentation, the limits of a given mythological situation.⁶

I pass now to a passage where the exposition of a teaching does not leave much place for a mythological plot, but where the very way in which the teaching is exposed (in a manner not dissimilar to that in the Bhagavadgita) can be understood hermeneutically by means of understanding the points of view and states of consciousness *within* the text. The teaching itself is here as general as *any* teaching can be, and it is its generality and universalism that contrast so sharply with the extreme concreteness of its exposition. To treat this passage as mythological—and not metaphysical or theological—is only one way of treating it, and I will try to show by way of this example the relative character and limited scope of mythology as an approach to the content of a text.

2

YOU CANNOT DO IT INDEFINITELY; THE PLOT
OF ANOTHER STORY OF INDRA: THE PARADE
OF ANTS

VII.1. ‘After having slain the gigantic dragon, Indra deputed Vishvakarman, the Divine Architect, to construct Heaven again. Vishvakarman completed the construction of the Heavenly Capital in one full year. That excellent city, constructed with excellent gems and ornamented with wonderful diamonds, looked very beautiful indeed. Nay, it was incomparable in the world: but Indra was not, even then, satisfied.

⁶ This is a treatment of ‘situation’ quite different from that in Lecture Two where it is opposed to plot within the content of a text.

Vishvakarman, unable to go away without his command, with an aggrieved heart, sought the protection of Brahma who, knowing his purpose, thus addressed him, 'O God, tomorrow you will be relieved from your task.' Hearing this, the Divine Architect soon went back to Indra's Heaven.

2-3. After that, Brahma went to Vishnu's paradise, Vaikuntha, bowed to Hari and announced his will. Hari consoled Brahma, sent him back to Brahma-loka, assumed the form of a child, and arrived at Heaven's gate. He was dwarfish, smiling, and looked like a child, but he was wiser and more clever than an old man. Hari arrived at the threshold of Indra and said to the Warder, 'O Warder, go quickly to Indra and tell him that a Brahmin has arrived at the gate to see him.' Indra came hastily and saw the Brahmin boy smiling and full of the lustre of Brahma. Indra bowed to Hari and Hari cheerfully blessed him. Then Indra asked him, 'O Lord, tell me the cause of your arrival.' The Brahmin, who was the Guru of the Guru even of Brihaspati, replied thus, 'O King of the gods, I have heard about the construction of your wonderful city and I desire to know in how many years do you wish to get your city constructed and what more engineering will Visvakarman display in this matter? O best of gods, no Indra before you was capable of effecting such a construction.' Indra, infatuated with the wine of triumph, laughed loudly and asked, 'O Brahmin boy, please reveal to me, how many Indras or Vishvakarmans you have seen and about how many you have heard.' The Brahmin boy laughed in his turn and spoke thus: 'Child, I know your father, Praja-Pati Kashyapa and your grandfather Marichi, the great saint. I know also lord Brahma, the offspring of the navel of Vishnu and I know the virtuous Vishnu, the preserver of Brahma. O king of the gods, I also know of the dreadful dissolution of the world turning it into a huge mass of water void of all *beings*. Indeed, no one can say how many kinds of creation, or universes, or ages are there and in each universe how many Brahmas, Vishnus or Shivas exist. O king of the gods, it is possible to count the particles of sand or the drops of rain-water but no one can count the Indras. Indra's life lasts seven yugas according to the Divine calculation; and the period covered by 28 Indras is equivalent to one day and night of Brahma. Brahma's life consists of 108 Brahma-years, according to the above standard, and, there is no end to the number of Brahmas, let alone Indras. None can calculate those universes each of which contains a Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. As a boat floats on the waters of the world, so the Brahmandas float on the pure water arising out of the pores of the skin of Maha Vishnu. Like the pores of Maha Vishnu, the universes

4. which contain many gods like yourself are countless.' While the best of persons spoke thus, he saw that a row of ants happened to pass by that way in the form of a bow. Then the Brahmin, when he saw them, laughed loudly; but he said nothing. Indra, when he heard the laughter of the Brahmin boy, was astonished. His palate, lips and throat became dry and he again asked, 'O Brahmin, why did you laugh? And who are you in the guise of a boy? You seem to me to be the ocean of virtue obscured by delusion.' The Brahmin boy addressed him thus: 'I laughed at the sight of the ants. The cause is mysterious. Do not question me on the subject which contains the germ of sorrow and is otherwise a fruitful source of your wisdom. That mysterious subject strikes an axe at the root of the tree of the world, and serves like an excellent lamp to people obscured by the darkness of ignorance. It can very rarely be penetrated even by Yogis versed in the Vedas and is calculated to crush the pride of fools.' Indra with his lips, throat and palate parched, again asked him, 'O son of a Brahmin, reveal to me at once that old, mysterious subject which dispels illusion like the lamp of wisdom. I do not know who you are in the guise of a boy; you seem to be the personification of accumulated wisdom.' Hari replied:

5. 'O Indra, I saw the ants, passing in a line one by one; each of them was an Indra on one occasion by virtue of his karma. Now in the course of time, after a series of *births*, these creatures have attained the condition of ants.

6. Persons led by karma go either to the stainless Vaikuntha or to the domains of Brahma or Shiva, or to Heaven, or to a place similar to Heaven, or to the nether world (Patala or the hideous hell). Through karma alone, people are born as boars or as small animals or spring out of the womb of female beasts or birds. Through karma, a person attains the womb of an insect, the condition of a tree, the position of a Brahmin or a god or Indra or Brahma, or acquires happiness or sorrow, or becomes a master or a servant. Through karma, he ascends a ladder, becomes a king or gets disease or acquires beauty or deformity or attains the condition of a monster. This karma is subservient to character which in its turn is controlled by habit. The idea which has just been announced leads to happiness and final beatitude. It constitutes the essence of all things and helps a person to cross the ocean of hell. Death, deputed by Time, is at the head of all things, for all the animate and inanimate objects of the world, O Indra, are transitory like dream. O Indra, the good and the evil which attend a person are destroyed like bubbles of water. They rotate constantly like wheels. This is why my

servants are not attached to them.' Having heard this the king of the gods came to regard himself as a very

7. insignificant individual. At this time, a very old ascetic arrived at that place. The great Muni was dressed in the skin of a black deer, he had clusters of knotted hair on his head and had a bright mark on his forehead. There was a circle of hair on his chest, and his head was shaded by a parasol made of grass. The cluster of hair on his chest appeared to have been uprooted in some places. The Muni took his seat there like a lump of stone.

The great Indra, when he saw the Muni, joyfully bowed to him, humbly enquired into his welfare and with pleasure and esteem offered to him the hospitalities due to a guest, Then the Brahmin-boy said, 'O Muni, whence have you come? What is your name? What is the cause of your arrival? Where is your home? What is the meaning of the parasol of grass over your head and why has the incomparable circle of hair on your chest been uprooted in some places? Reveal to me in brief all this wonderful matter, I am curious to hear.' The great Muni

8. said: 'O Brahmin, my name is Lomasha. The cause of my arrival is to see Indra. As I am short-lived, I have decided not to build my house anywhere or to marry or to secure any sort of living. At present, begging is my only livelihood. To shield myself against rain and the sun, I hold that umbrella over my head. And listen to the reason why I wear a circle of hair on my chest. It is a source of both fear and wisdom to the people of the world. The fall of one Indra causes the extraction of one hair from my chest. This is why the hairs in the middle have been uprooted, (indicating the fall of so many Indras). In this way, as soon as the other half of the period allotted to Brahma expires I am destined to die. O Brahmin, if even endless Brahmas must die, it follows that I am short-lived. Therefore what is the use of a wife, son or house?

When a mere twinkle in the eyes of Hari causes the fall of a Brahma it necessarily follows that everything is unreal. This is why I am always thinking of the incomparable lotus-feet of Hari. Faith in Hari is greater than redemption. All prosperity is transi-ent like a dream and interferes with one's belief in Hari. Shambhu, the good spiritual guide, has imparted to me this excellent knowledge.' The Muni, so saying, went to Shiva; and Hari in the guise of a boy also disappeared. Indra was astonished to behold this wonderful event

9. which appeared to him just like a dream. He had no longer the slightest desire to secure worldly prosperity. Afterwards the lord of a hundred sacrifices (Indra) sent for Vishvakarman with sweet words, presented to him a larger number of gems and sent him home. Thus

acquiring wisdom and desirous to gain redemption, he entrusted the charge of his kingdom to his son and was about to proceed to the forest.

10. Then Sachi, beholding her husband on his way to renunciation, was overwhelmed with grief; and oppressed by fear and sorrow, she sought the protection of her spiritual guide. The lustful goddess induced Brihaspati to turn up there by representing to him all the facts of the case, and according to the rules of dharma she comforted Indra. The spiritual guide himself composed a science dealing with the method of how to control the passion of husband or wife and affectionately expounded these doctrines to Indra.'

[*Brahma-vaivarta-puranam*...by Vinayaka Ganesa Apte (**Anandaśrama** Sanskrit Series), vol. 2, pp. 341–3; *Brahma-vaivarta-puranam*, Ganesa and Krisna Janma Khandas, trans. by R.N.Sen, Allahabad, 1922, pp. 310–312.]

§1

The intermediary and mediating position of Brahma

The plot here reflects the hierarchy of beings involved or, more precisely, is one with this hierarchy. A mere division of knowledges according to their respective events into natural, supernatural and extraordinary (where the last assumes very often the role of the *intermediary*) is reproduced in this passage, if looked at from the point of view of **I**, **III** and **IV**, entirely at the level of the supernatural. In other words, this triple division is reapplied to the supernatural formally manifested in *gods* who, in their turn, become subject to the same classification. So what we have in **VII** is, first of all, ordinary, 'simple' or 'natural' gods—Vishvakarman, a minor figure but very representative of his kind, and Indra, the King of Gods. The application of *our* word 'natural' is quite justified here, because they were, together with all other beings and universes *created* or, rather, *recreated* by Brahma. The last, as *creator*, transcends his creation, but still remains bound by it. That is why he figures in **VII** as a kind of 'intermediary' instance, mediating between the 'natural' gods and the gods whom we, merely for convention's sake, will call 'transcendental', i.e., Vishnu and Shiva. This mediating position is shown in Brahma's interceding for Vishvakarman before Vishnu.

§2

Knowledge and states of consciousness

However, as we have already singled out knowledge as the basis of our classificatory attempts and the point of departure in our hermeneutical procedure, we have now to admit quite unambiguously, that the whole plot of **VII** is based on the knowledge of Vishnu as its sole didactic, objective and generative factor. In **VII** in a way not altogether dissimilar to, but much stronger than, in **IV** this knowledge, while it operates within the plot, reveals its pragmatic goal, its didactic method, its principal tendency, its central object and the states of consciousness (or mental states) which figure conjointly with it. Let us start with the last.

§3.

*The states of consciousness and the knowledge in IV;
states of consciousness as yoga*

State of consciousness (S) here is a category introduced in a hermeneutical procedure only and exclusively for our own description of that which is given *within* a text as knowledge (K) or event (E). Although, of course, this does not preclude these states from being *already described*, not by the investigator of texts, but in the text itself.

So, for instance, we see that in **IV** Arjuna 'refused to fight' (E) in a 'state of despondency' (S), and that in **V** Prince Bahram Gur went a-hunting in a state of amorous excitement. And we also see in **III** that even such a supernatural being as Kindama cursed Pandu while in a state of mortal anguish, leaving the king in a state of mortal fear, etc., in which cases these states figure, themselves, as events E(S). On the other hand, they may be described within the text by one of the personages or by one of the narrators, as a knowledge [K(S)]. That is exactly what we observe in **IV**, where Krishna the Lord explains to Arjuna that his state of despondency (and following it his refusal to fight) is concomitant with his ordinary (i.e., natural) knowledge (K₁) which is wrong: wrong not as such, but because it finds itself in a situation determined and pre-arranged by the Divine Knowledge of Krishna. However—and this is an extremely interesting point—it is that very state of despondency, when one is aware or conscious of it as such, that becomes, together with oneself, an object of meditation, and is regarded, retrospectively, and described (by the commentator) as 'the Yoga of Arjuna's despondency'. So, in the presence of a higher knowledge (K₁^{sn} or K₁^D, in the case of the Divine Knowledge of Krishna) any state of

consciousness, however normal, ordinary or negative, can be 'reworked' into a kind of yoga (traditionally each situation and, thereby, each chapter of the Bhagavadgita is called 'a yoga of...'): ($K_1(S) \rightarrow K_1^D(S^{sn})$). Or—and we will come to it later in more detail—it is the *exposition* of supernatural or Divine Knowledge that may induce some 'new' states of consciousness, as we see it in Krishna's exposing himself as the whole universe *viśva-rūpa* in **IV**, and in the Parade of Ants in **VII**: $K^D \rightarrow S_1^{sn}$.

§4

The states of consciousness in VII; state of consciousness as mental and knowledge as non-mental

In **VII** (as partly in **IV**) we observe the states of consciousness as *intentional*, in the sense that we interpret them as that which, if looked at from the point of view of the hermeneutist, informs the events and gives direction to one's knowledge, but—and I emphasize it again—which has no describable content of its own even if such states are described in the text *as* events or knowledges. From this it follows that, though described in the text as being related to knowledge, the states of consciousness are, in that relation, 'psychical', in other words they represent what could be called 'psychism' or 'mentalism' in individuals, whereas knowledge, in that very relation, represents something 'objective'; 'non-individual' and, thereby, non-psychological. [That is why there cannot be, phenomenologically speaking, a psychology of knowledge, for knowledge can investigate its own process only in terms of its regime and conditions, i.e., states of consciousness, and not in terms of its content.]

The states of consciousness of the personages (all of them gods) in **VII** are as follows: 1. Indra's state of elation and pride after his triumph over the dragon Vritra. 2. Indra's unbridled imaginativeness and his persistent desire to go on and on building his new heavenly capital. 3. Vishvakarman's tiredness and disappointment when he sees that the job cannot be completed. 4. Brahma's...—but here we have to stop, for the text says nothing about Brahma's state or states of consciousness or their absence. 5. It can be stated quite positively about both Vishnu and Shiva that they have no states of consciousness at all (theirs is the 'zero state' of consciousness), and not because the last are not described in the text but because theirs is knowledge in itself, variously exposed, but not related to, conditioned by, or concomitant with any state of

consciousness whatsoever. 6. Indra's bewilderment (when he learns that there have been innumerable Indras). 7. Indra's humility and self-humiliation. 8. Sachi's lust. 9. Indra's resignation. This, in fact, is that what determines the *plot* of **VII**.

§5

*A classification of protagonists in **VII** according to
their states of consciousness*

From this enumeration alone it follows that all personages (gods) in **VII** can be divided into two groups—those with and those without states of consciousness, with Brahma the creator figuring, as it were, as intermediary between the two. Or, putting it slightly differently, the gods in **VII** are classified as 'mental' or 'psychical' on the one hand, and Vishnu and Shiva as transcendental (transcending the mental and psychical) on the other. Thus, states of consciousness play here the same classificatory role as is played by knowledge in our previous classification into natural and supernatural (which in turn can be classified into degrees of supernaturality, so to speak). Let us ask: classification of what? What is the object to be classified? Or, more precisely, can *we* present **VII** as a case where we can imagine the 'existence'—I use the word for lack of a better—of the largest possible class of 'objects' which can subsequently be classified into subclasses, sub-sub-classes, etc., according to one (monothetic classification) or more than one (polythetic classification) classificatory principle?

§6

*From states of consciousness to ontology and
cosmology; the spatio-temporal structure of the
universe and the cosmological postulate*

To answer these questions we have to leave, for the time being at least, the background of plot together with the mental states of the protagonists and pass to a kind of *ontology*. In other words, we have to postulate the *central object* of the teaching in **VII** in terms of *BEING*, itself non-discrete and indeterminable, which, though referred to in connection with the god Vishnu (and secondarily with Shiva), becomes actually Vishnu (or Shiva) only by way of concretization and explication in the text. This concretization is always expressed *as* (more than *within*) abstract mythological *space* or *meta-universe*. The term is, of course, mine, and is introduced simply to denote on the one hand the

point of departure in *our* understanding, wherefrom we start imagining the cosmogonic ‘process’ of emanation and creation of other universes, and on the other the whole cosmological picture, i.e., sum total of myriads and myriads of *discrete* universes of *discrete* animate beings (*jīva, sattva*), existing synchronically now or at any given moment. The last are to be classified in relation to their place in a given universe, such, for instance, as ours, i.e., the universe where the situation of **VII** took place. [The Puranic world-outlook, of which **VII** is a typical specimen, allows for simultaneous application of several different classifications of living beings (i.e., based on different classificatory principles and applied according to different rules of application).]

The enormous difficulty of explaining the spatio-temporal structure of Puranic cosmology is that in its exposition, as for instance we see it in **VII**, the distinction between space (synchronicity) and time (diachronicity) is blurred, intentionally or unintentionally. [David Seyfort Ruegg suggested to me once, that in the Puranas it might have been unintentional, while in the Avatamsaka it was intentional.] The Puranic cosmological postulate being ‘the creator transcends the created’, it might, then, be assumed that there is an uncreated universe which cannot be transcended even by Vishnus who emanate from it unmanifested. Then this universe could be called, for convention’s sake, ‘meta-universe’ for the sole reason that other universes are described with references to it, but it cannot be described with reference to anything else. Uncreated and unmanifested as it is, this meta-universe can be but one and sole, and not many as other universes, created and manifested.

The difficulty of distinguishing between time and space becomes almost unsurmountable when we deal with universal cosmology as it is presented in such a simple (for ‘simple people’, that is) exposition as **VII** seems to be; or, shall we say, the difficulty of making a distinction between cosmology proper, i.e., a picture of the universe or universes as they are now or at any given moment of their synchronous existence—synchronous also with the existence of the external observer—and cosmogony proper, i.e., a picture of the cosmos as it is imagined existing in time. In the last case the observer witnesses its various phases, placing himself, in one way or another, outside the temporal framework of the universe pictured by him. It is these two possible positions of the external observer that serve as a point of departure in our attempt to understand the cosmos of the Brahmavaivarta-Purana for, as I have said, ours is the task of understanding it as they, its narrator and personages, *knew* it, for theirs is the knowledge of it and

ours is an understanding of their knowledge of their cosmos, and not a knowledge of it!

§7

The Puranic cosmos; the Vishnu-Bodies, Brahma-Universes, and 'ordinary' or Indra-Universes; the indeterminacy of time and a difficulty with 'the same-ness'

The exposition of their idea of the whole cosmos, in both its cosmological and cosmogonic aspects, begins with the un-named *space* (not place) where a number of 'pure oceans', which are the Bodies of the Great Vishnus, are floating. This space, as such undefined in terms of either time of creation or of size or form, we will, for convention's sake, call the 'Meta-Universe', and each of the Vishnu-Bodies it comprises, a 'Mega-Universe'. And, as the passage tells us, 'out of every hair-pore of a Vishnu-Body a Brahma-Universe (*brahmāṇḍa*, a "Brahma-egg") bubbles and breaks'. It is here that what could be called creation proper starts, for what we have seen hitherto remains unnamed, indestructible, unmanifested (*akṣara*), and timeless. And only here, in the emergence of numerous Brahma-Universes, within these 'bubbles', the space becomes concrete and assumes its limits, while time assumes its duration. Each Brahma-Universe comprises a number of 'ordinary' universes with their gods headed by Indras, men, animals and other animate beings.

Let me emphasize, in this connection, that the very idea of 'now' and 'then', of 'simultaneously' and 'consecutively', and of 'synchronicity' and 'diachronicity' can have sense only with respect to, and in one's (be he a personage or an external observer) understanding of, a given concrete Brahma-Universe. This means that while speaking of two (or more) Brahma-Universes, the observer is not able to connect in time one thing or event occurring in the first with one (or the same?) thing or event occurring in the second, for to do that he would have to transcend, so to speak, them both, that is, to place himself in the Mega-Universe of a Vishnu-Body from which they emerge, where there is no time or, if there is, it would not be the same time as that of any of the Brahma-Universes it contains. From such an indeterminacy of time may follow—not logically but merely mythologically—that it would be impossible to call two things or events occurring in two Brahma-Universes, 'the same', which applies to all beings created and un-created. And it is here that we find ourselves before a terrible stumbling block, for a question

arises—a nightmare for all those involved in the study not only of Puranic but practically any other Indian cosmology: can there be any being the same as any other, or can there be ‘sameness’ as regards more than one animate being? And if so, what does ‘there is no end to the number of Brahmas, to say nothing of Indras’ mean, if we have already taken into account that it remains totally uncertain whether these Brahmas and Indras follow each other in time or co-exist with each other in space, or both, or neither? To answer these questions let us first return to the plurality of Indras, Brahmas, Shivas and Vishnus with their respective universes, as it is presented in **VII**.

§8

The Parade of Ants and its mythological and metaphysical consequences

In **VII.6**, Vishnu exposed to Indra a ‘parade of ants’, each of which *was Indra* at one time or another in *its* past, but now, i.e., at the time of Vishnu’s exposition, had become an ant. So, let us ask ourselves: can we say of each of them that, after having been *an* Indra (not Indra, but *an* Indra) and then due to his (an Indra’s that is) bad karma after having passed through billions of worse and worse reincarnations, it became an ant in one of the billions of the universes created by Brahmas? We know from **VII** that the number of Indras and their respective Indra-Worlds created by *one* Brahma during his life-span is 1,103,76 [and the number of ‘Indra eons’ or *kalpas* in which one Brahma life-span (consisting of 108 Brahma-years) can be calculated as 78,366,960, which amounts, approximately, to something like 160,000,000,000,0. i.e., one trillion and six hundred billion, ‘human’ years.] So it can be assumed that each of these ants had ceased to be Indra together with the collapse of one of the Indra’s macro-universes (within, apparently, the same Brahma Universe), and then was reincarnated as a living being (*jīva*, *sattva*) in *another* Indra-Universe created by the same Brahma. All this of course, given the assumption that such an ‘exchange’ of Indras or other beings is possible only within the same Brahma-Universe, and that Brahma who figures in **VII** is, still, *the same* Brahma who was present as a creator at the time of all those Indras’ births and deaths as Indras.

The idea of this ‘exchange’ seems, at the first sight at any rate, quite feasible—if anything in Puranic mythology can be feasible—for when a Brahma creates an Indra-Universe, he creates it with its Indra already in the play. From this, among other things, it may follow that the whole ‘living material’, so to speak, is not as such created by Brahma, but

rather 'taken' from another Indra-Universe which had already collapsed by the time of this particular creation. It can then be surmised that Vishnu, in the Parade of Ants, did *synchronize* in one place those ants of 1,103,76 Indras who, by that time, had degenerated into ants, and whose universes had collapsed billions of years 'ago'. While the Muni in **VII.8**, a manifestation of Shiva, showed in the circle of hair on his chest a *diachronical* picture of the dying and passing out of Indras in, supposedly, the same Brahma-Universe. But as to whether or not such an exchange of 'Indras' could happen between various Brahma-Universes, let alone Vishnu-Mega-Universes, that I cannot even guess. Nor, least of all, can I conjecture as to whether the various Brahma-Universes that 'bubble and break out of every hair-pore' of a Vishnu-Body are the same, that is, repeat each other in their composition and evolution. It is at this point, however, that we should turn from the 'sameness' of time and universes to that of beings.

§9

*Who can recognize whom?—a strange postulate of
mythological epistemology*

That is easier said than done. We must first take up again the question of *knowledge in myth* (K_m). It is self-evident that the ants could not recognize Indra in each other, let alone Indra himself in the ants. Further, this very Indra of **VII** could not *know* any other Indra of the same Brahma-Universe, not to speak of those of other Brahma-Universes. [I use the word 'know' here in the sense in which I say, 'Yes, I know John', or 'I know of the existence of a concrete person whom you called John just now', and not in the sense that 'I know that there is such a proper name as John, and that there are some people (or cats, or dogs, etc.) so called.'] So what is emerging here, in trying to generalize situation **VII**, can be called the first mythological, and not methodological, postulate concerning 'beings' of whatever kind in **VII**: *an animate being in one Indra-Universe cannot know any other being in another Indra-Universe as itself or as not-itself*. Only those can know that who are situated in a universe which comprises the two Indra-Universes, i.e. a Brahma-Universe in our case, and only with respect to *other* beings, not to themselves. Which means (mythologically) that the Brahmas of two Brahma-Universes can recognize 'the same Brahma' in one another only provided that they are situated in *one place*, i.e., within the range of one another's perception, which is impossible by definition. For to do so they would have to be situated within one and

the same boundary of one and the same *phenomenal* (i.e., perceivable and perceiving) sphere of a Brahma-Universe—and this, of course, could have been done only by Vishnu or Shiva who transcend this or any other Brahma-Universe, in the first place, and only provided that ‘a Brahma’, or the two or more Brahmas in question, are *no Brahmas*, as those Indras exhibited in the parade of ants were no Indras. But were they?

§10

*What does ‘Indra’ mean? The problem of name;
uniqueness and ‘sameness’ of person; name is the
mark of one’s knowledge of oneself as another; Indra
versus an Indra*

It is here that we come to the problem of *name*: what, then, does ‘Indra’ (or ‘Brahma’, or John, for that matter) mean if—and, let me reiterate it once more—no Indra could ever possibly *know* that he *is* (or *was*, it doesn’t matter *now*!) an ant just as no ant could possibly know that he was or is Indra.

The possible answer, as I glimpse it, is that in **VII**:

A. The phenomenology of ‘sameness’ is not about ‘the same as me’ in the sense that there is or might be somebody who is ‘exactly the same as me’ (a twin ‘I’), or something that is ‘exactly the same as something else’ (a twin universe), but about the *knowledge* that I and someone else named as me are one and the same person, and that the two universes named by one name are one and the same universe. Then the name would be the only possible denotation of this one-ness.

B. But one cannot know oneself as oneself and somebody (or something) else at one and the same *time* (remember what was said here of ‘the sameness’ of time). For one is not like Vishnu who, when he was a boar (his third *avatāra*), knew himself, and not a boar (!) as himself. [In such cases we are in the same taxonomic class with Indra or even Brahma, for that matter.] If my twin ‘I’ were possible, this would be of no importance whatsoever, for he would remain outside the field of *my* self-perception as *the other*, not me, however identical to me he might be in everyone’s *objective* knowledge, including my own. [Vishnu-Boar was not his twin, was it?] The name (Indra, John, Alexander, Vishvakarman, etc.) will be *that which, though itself objectively non-unique (Indras, Johns, etc.) marks the uniqueness of the link between one’s self-perception (unique par excellence) and one’s objectivity (non-unique also par excellence for two beings can be objectively, from*

outside, observed as identical). Or, to put it more precisely and in the stricter sense in which it is used in VII: one's proper name denotes the point where one being is synchronized in time and situated together in one place, with another being, and knows (not perceives!) it as oneself—then the name is the mark of this knowledge.

As we saw in VII, it is Vishnu and Shiva who made known to Indra the fact of all those ants being him at the time and in the place where the parade of ants was shown. But not the other way round, for those paraded ants were not and could not have been aware that they too, as it were, had been Indra at one time (or place?) or another. Because it is Indra in our passage who was meant to learn about his transience as Indra (not as *an* Indra, note!), and not the ants. Although they served as the expository material to show that they did not know that or anything else, serving as *mere objects* without any mental (psychical, etc.) subjectivity assigned to them and thereby, lacking the name 'Indra', which, as we have already noted, implies knowledge while they could not know anything, being divinely produced—in the sense of being brought there and then—by Vishnu who knew everything. Therefore, although the ants were shown to Indra as 'past Indras' they might easily have been future or never existent ones, figuring as a kind of simulacrum of souls or selves, but not as *persons*. Because a soul or self assumes its 'person-ness', so to speak, only on the condition of its assuming *the name*, which in the beginningless time of reincarnations is possible only when it became—in our case—Indra.

C. Therefore, speaking of this very Indra-Universe created by Brahma (together with the other Indra-Universes, whose Brahma-Universe bubbled out of a hair-pore of the Vishnu Body, i.e., the Vishnu-Mega-Universe), we have to assume that 'our' Indra of VII could never have met or seen *another* Indra as Indra and, consequently, as (or the same as) himself. For Indra is *a person*, and a soul or Self cannot change its universe without losing its *person-ness cum name*. Or, to put it more precisely, *an exchange of persons between two Indra-Universes, within one Brahma-Universe, is possible only as an exchange of souls or Selves*. But as any Indra-Universe, let alone Brahma-Universe, has its own spatio-temporal structure incommensurable with and only weakly, if at all, related to any other, 'the sameness' of two or more persons could be 'theoretically', i.e., in the sense of a 'theory from a myth', established only provided that they are brought together from different Indra-Universes; and even then their 'sameness' would be temporary, that is, effective, so to speak, at the time of such a Divine, i.e., effectuated by Vishnu, synchronization only. And then it will be up

to Indra to regard those ants as ‘the other Indras’ of the past, or as himself in the past or present. What, however, really matters here is that, *while ‘the sameness’ of a named person is undeterminable in terms of time, its soul or Self remains a-temporal by definition.*

3

A FURTHER COMMENTARY ON **VII**: THE
COSMOS OF ACTS AND PERSONS

§1

*A universe as a place for action and reincarnation;
place and time as place and time of actions of
animate beings*

It ought to be taken into account, however, that what, in fact, **VII** is about is the abstract (i.e., not specified or classified into groups or classes) ‘living’ or ‘animate’ beings, on the one hand, and the concrete and named gods, on the other; soul or Self (*ātman*) finds no mention there. And it is as animate beings, not Selves, that Indras go on from one reincarnation to another by the law of karma, animate beings of which ‘the infinity of the primaeval ocean is empty after the dreadful dissolution of a Brahma-Universe, at the end of its cycle’ (**VII.9**). Karma here is that ‘force’ of one’s actions (also called karma), that makes one an animate being in one of the Indra-Universes of one of the Brahma-Universes within one of the Vishnu-Bodies or Oceans. But when a Brahma-Universe collapses into a Vishnu-Mega-Universe (Ocean), the Law of Karma, as we know it, stops, for it collapses with all its animate beings, not selves, so that there remains nobody or nothing, to *act*. Self, *ātman*, does not act, and we know nothing of the condition of its being (or non-being) after the collapse of a Brahma-Universe. At the same time, and this is no less important mythologically, where there is nobody or nothing that acts, there is no karma there—if of course we accept that there can be no *transfer* of karma after the collapse of a Brahma-Universe—and thereby, no *place* for one to be reincarnated. No one’s universe, in other words. So what we have in this case of cosmological-cosmogonic structure, is that ‘animate being’ and ‘place’ or ‘universe’ are *coterminous*, whereas Self (*ātman*) is not coterminous with place as it is not with time. Therefore, place (not space) and time are the place and time of, and in the sense of, animate beings committing actions.

§2

Three classifications: synchronic, synchronic-diachronic, and diachronic

Therefore, the first tentative synchronic classification of all that there is in **VII** is a classification into discrete animate beings, such as Vishvakarman, Indra, Brahma and even you and myself, for that matter, on the one hand, and into that which is not discrete animate beings, that is, Vishnu, Shiva and souls or Selves as such, on the other. The universes, respectively, might be classified into unmanifested ones, such as the Meta-Universe where the Vishnu-Bodies float, the Mega-Universes of Vishnu-Bodies, and those which are manifested by and in creation and contain animate beings, i.e., Brahma-Universes and Indra-Worlds.

In terms of synchronic-diachronic classification ‘non-animate beings’, such as Vishnu and Shiva, can be divided into their manifestations, such as a brahman-boy and a muni, and their unmanifested beings. The classification is called ‘synchronicdiachronic’ here because Vishnu is not Vishnu as such at one moment and a brahman-boy at another, but eternally remains the same irrespective of however many manifestations he may assume at once or sequentially.

Diachronically each and every animate being taken separately can be presented as a member of a class all members of which are *the same person*—if looked at from the point of view *of person*, and provided that we confine our classificatory efforts to within one and the same Indra-world with its ‘history’ of creation, continuation and destruction. This can be explained in the following way, partly repeating what was said about ‘person’ before, and using, again, Indra as an example.

§3.

Indra as a named person: a person as a named ‘middle’

A soul or Self, beginningless in the beginningless meta-universe, unnamed, whose reincarnations as many different animate beings, prior to its being reincarnated in this Brahma-Universe and in this particular Indra-world, are unknown—this soul or Self we have here reincarnated as an animate being named Indra. Of course it might have been, or will be reincarnated in this Brahma-Universe as many other animate beings due to good or bad karma, but this can become known subjectively, i.e., in *its* knowledge, or even objectively, i.e., in the knowledge of an

external observer, only after it has already learnt of or been shown these animate beings *as himself*. As the history of a child can begin ONLY when a person starts recollecting or describing himself as a child—for when he actually *was* a child he simply lived—so the whole series of animate beings which one was or will be only starts when one has already become a *named person* who begins recollecting or otherwise knowing them: not a moment earlier. Therefore, speaking phenomenologically, i.e., from the point of view of knowledge acquired or to be acquired, *the fact* of one's previous or future being as another animate being can be established only from that 'middle' of one's series of reincarnations, which for convention's sake we call 'a person'. Without that 'personal' *point cum moment* of knowledge or self-recognition one's previous or future rebirths simply *are not there*, remaining a kind of sheer metaphysical metaphor.

§4

Person, animate being, and Self; karma and a hierarchical classification of 'beings' within the meta-universe

Thus, from the point of view of one 'person', himself related to time and temporary, so to speak, the whole class of animate beings which he was, is and will be, can be presented in time as '*past animate beings*→*the person*→*future animate beings*'. At the same time, from the point of view of this person's Self (*ātman*), all the animate beings which it has inhabited, while abiding in one given Indra-World or even Brahma-Universe, can be imagined in terms of unilinear time as '*past animate beings*→(*the person*)→*future animate beings*...—*past animate beings*→(*the person*)→*future animate beings*...—...

'The person' is put in brackets here to show that, from the point of view of *ātman*, it is *ātman* itself which knows, which is the only knower, and that 'person' is merely accidental. [When Krishna says to Arjuna in IV, 'I know all my reincarnations...and you do not know yours'...he figures as *ātman* (more exactly, *paramātman*, 'the Highest Self').] Here however the division of 'all that is Indra' or 'all the Indras' into past, present (Indra as the person alone), and future unknown animate beings becomes a fact only due to Divine Synchronization of them by Vishnu and diachronization of them by Shiva. [Symbolically, diachronization signifies death and synchronization, continuation.]

And finally, all animate beings in the Meta-Universe at a given moment—though I am fully aware that a synchronization of beings and

events in the Meta-Universe is an idea absurd *par excellence*, so that the expression ‘at a given moment’ is no more than a mythological metaphor—can be classified into taxonomic classes, sub-classes, and sub-sub-classes on the basis of several differentiating principles. So, if we limit ourselves to our passage **VII** and use the criterion of ‘good or bad karma’ applied by the brahman boy, i.e., Vishnu in **VII.6**, we will get the following hierarchical classification. (See next page.)

§5

Brahma in VII as the limit of phenomenal existence

As we see it in our classificatory scheme, the sphere of animate beings within one Brahma-Universe is divided, in our passage, into four monothetically established classes, trees, animals, men and gods, and is presented as a strictly hierarchical system. Each position in this system is *diachronically* determined by one’s karma and one’s status as an animate being. But being an animate being is, itself, a result of one’s karma. This is so in the sense that not only birth as an animate being belonging to the class of gods, for example, is karmically determined, but also birth as an animate being in general too. Moreover, the very phenomenon of animate being in a Brahma-Universe is determined by and, in a way, *one with*, karma. Brahma, then, will figure as the *limit* of ‘animate being-ness’, for it is with him that karma stops diachronically and the phenomenal world ends synchronically. Being, however, the creator of his universe and, by definition, transcending his own creation, he can be seen as the first animate being, in terms of time and space, and as the last animate being in any sphere of phenomenal existence, and, as such, is related to the transcendental sphere of the Vishnu-Body from which he emerged together with his universe and into which he will be re-immersed after its dissolution.

§6

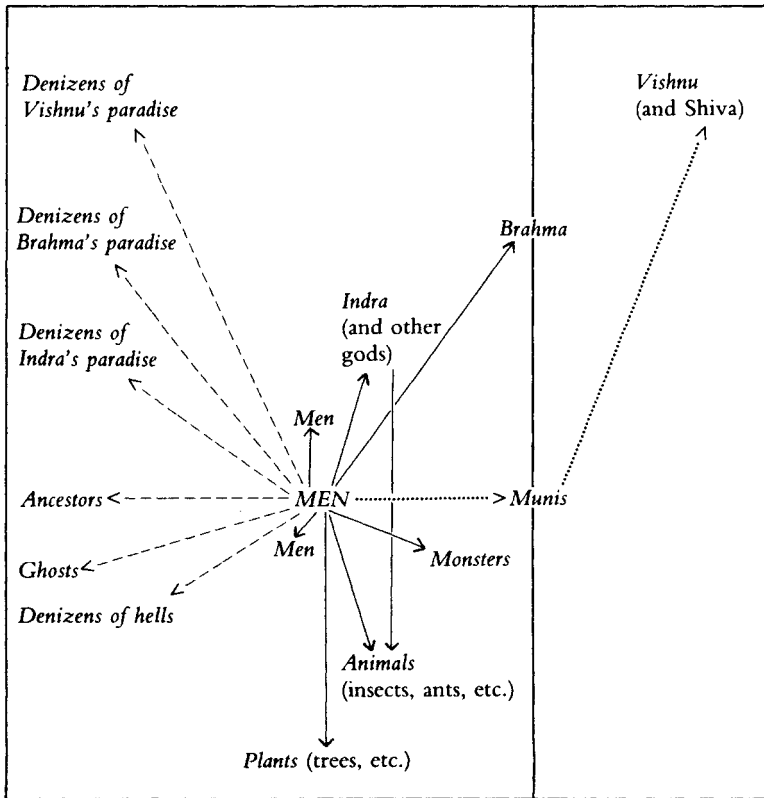
The intermediary position of Brahma and the great ascetics

The partial transcendency of Brahma is, in itself, extremely interesting, though in our passage it is no more than alluded to, for it indicates, however strange it may seem, the *intermediary or intermediate position of a creator god in mythology*—the position between the created and uncreated, or between the phenomenal and the transcendental. [It is because of this, all other reasons considered, that the absence of a real

The META-UNIVERSE

*A created Brahma-Universe of Karma
and animate beings*

*A Mega-Universe of
Vishnu without Karma
and animate beings*



An arrow ———> shows the karmic line of ascent or descent within the universe of animate beings.

A dotted arrow> shows the a-karmic way (of humans only) beyond the confines of the universe of animate beings.

An interrupted arrow ---> shows the karmic line of ascent or descent—but through human death only.

cult of Brahma can be explained—because his main role is mythological, not ritualistic.]

The position of munis or great ascetics, within this classificatory scheme, can be seen as analogous to that of Brahma, though it exhibits a totally different mythological tendency. For while Brahma transcends

his Brahma-Universe by virtue of being its creator, i.e., by means of his centrifugal activity (associated with the predominance in him of the *guṇa rajas*), the munis transcend the Brahma-Universe by means of their inward-directed centripetal activity (associated with predominance in them of the *guṇa tamās*). They leave the phenomenal world by destroying their karma in themselves and therewith ceasing to be animate beings, while still outwardly abiding in this world though inwardly already detached from it. Theirs is, objectively, a counter-creational tendency, for creation presupposes evolution of the universe of animate beings in time, from the past through the present to the future—the unilinear time of one's successive reincarnations as animate beings within the same Brahma-Universe—whereas they, by severing karmic links with the past and the future, are about to enter Vishnu's Mega-Universe, the cosmic space between the islands of creation (i.e., Brahma-Universes), and not Vishnu's paradise, Vaikuntha. This position of the munis seems to be mythologically analogous with or rather symmetrical to that of god Shiva who brings about the involution and subsequent collapse of a Brahma-Universe, and reflects the muni's association with him as the god of ascetics. They subvert, sabotage the Brahma-Universe from inside by *depleting the number of animate beings* in it—and it is this mythological idea that found its place, much later, in some versions of Mahayana Buddhism.

§7

The conscious versus the non-conscious as a mythological parameter of the universe

However, from the point of view of our hermeneutical attempt to understand the whole situation of **VII**, both Brahma creating the universe of animate beings and the munis de-creating it are marked by the mythological intermediateness of their respective positions. Provided, of course, that in the case of Brahma it is a manifested and *non-conscious* position—an outward directed creation is non-conscious by definition and is determined by (karmic) factors acting non-consciously—whereas the munis' position is that of complete transformation of consciousness (as we see it in **VII.8**), which is outwardly unmanifested and conscious *par excellence*. The vertical line of karmic 'ascent' or hierarchy here, if looked at diachronically and with respect to one *person* only, can be compared with a kind of individual phylogenetic evolution. Provided, of course, that unlike the classical picture of organic evolution of the 19th century, we deal here

with many 'stops', 'regressions', 'returns', and 'relapses' into previous stages. It was said above that only after having reached the stage of humans—though mythologically it remains open to conjecture whether it is possible to start one's peregrination in a Brahma-Universe as a man—can one become that of which *another* might speak as of somebody named so-and-so who had been such and such animate beings, might speak, that is, of a *person*. This, in turn, means that only from this moment, i.e., from the moment of becoming a person, can one relinquish one's progress or regress along the karmic vertical, with its ups (to the state of Brahma) and downs (to the state of plants), as well as the whole hierarchy of specifically *human* after-lives, i.e., hell, the world of wandering ghosts, the world of ancestors, the Paradise of Indra, the Paradise of Brahma, and the Paradise of Vishnu.

§8

A person is a potential 'abandoner' of person-ness

It is, then, after having relinquished the karmic world within his consciousness and become a muni, that a person can, in principle at least, begin his wanderings in the realm of the non-created and non-natural, wanderings which cannot be spoken of in terms of ups and downs or in terms of any direction, vertical or horizontal; they are shown by the dotted line here. In doing this, however, a person relinquishes his person-ness too, for the latter implies awareness of one's state in the karmic hierarchy together with one's conscious intention to progress in it or to abandon it altogether, whereby the notion of 'person' is here inherently tied up with the idea of a person as a 'potential abandoner' of personness. Then a person who knows his name and knows that others know it, changes it for another, that of a non-person, a complete ascetic, whose name denotes, in fact, not him as a person named so-and-so, but a *state* which he has achieved. [If seen in this light, the name of the Buddha—Shakyamuni—could be deemed to denote the *fact* of his reaching the state of Perfect and Complete Awakening, and not his last name (after Siddhartha and Gautama) as a person. That is why, by the way, we have such a widely spread Mahayanist idea of the 'multiplicity' of Buddhas Shakyamunis.] Or, in other words, the name of a complete ascetic is his last name as a person, and his first and last as a non-person.

A COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGICAL STUDY OF
TWO REVELATIONS: PERSON AS A
RELATIONAL CATEGORY IN MYTHOLOGY

§1

Questions and answers: the first approach

Now we have to pose, at last, three crucial questions concerning both our passages (i.e., **VII** and **IV**):

(1) Whom did Krishna and Vishnu address when they addressed Arjuna and Indra?

(2) What was revealed to Arjuna and Indra by Krishna and Vishnu?

(3) Who were Krishna and Vishnu themselves in relation to, and in terms of, the things revealed by them to Arjuna and Indra?

The answer to the first question might be that, from the point of view of the respective *contents* of two revelations, Arjuna was addressed as a Self or soul (*ātman*), and Indra as an animate being (*jīva*). From this the answer to the second question follows directly, namely, that if to Arjuna his *immortality* was revealed, to Indra it was his *mortality*. For however long the life-span of the latter, he will die in the end as an *animate being*, whereas the former will never die as *Self*. Would it follow from this then, that ‘Arjuna’ is the name of a Self and ‘Indra’ that of an animate being? To answer this question we have to return for the last time to our triad, ‘self, animate being, person’.

It is implied in **VII** that all animate beings have *Self* (more appropriate here than *Selves*). It is also implied in both **IV** and **VII** that there are *Selves* which are not animate beings but not the other way round. Person-ness begins with men—though the karmic human origin of gods is uncertain—continues in men and stops at Brahma on the one hand, and at munis on the other. Person here is a merely *relational* category, if not a probabilistic one, for it establishes, when and if it happens, a relation between an individual man (or a god), his *species* (men, gods), and the *generic* principle underlying the last (*jīva* or *ātman*). In both **IV** and **VII** it is the *objective* event of communication of the Divine Knowledge—knowledge of *ātman* in the first and knowledge of multiplicity of Indras and of the mystery of karma in the second—that *made* Arjuna and Indra persons. Only in the first case we have the ‘person-ness’ of Arjuna reduced to *ātman*, while in the second the ‘person-ness’ of Indra is reduced to his ‘animate beingness’. In both cases it is God’s calling them by their names that sealed, as it were,

their 'personification'. So if Arjuna and Indra are the names of the persons called 'Arjuna' and 'Indra', then their respective persons can be seen as that which, being named Arjuna and Indra, were called Arjuna and Indra by their God. Thus, reformulating our answer to the second question, we might say that, in the case of Arjuna, Krishna addresses *ātman* in the person of Arjuna, whereas in the case of Indra, Vishnu addresses an animate being in the person of Indra.

In replying to the third question it can be suggested that in **VII** Vishnu certainly *does not figure* as a person; or rather, that which appeared in the disguise of a brahman-boy was no person by definition, whereas the disguise itself, i.e., brahman-boy, cannot be seen as a person for it was a mere apparition, an entirely illusory body constructed by the Divine Illusionist, a conjuror who is not that body himself. This disguise is but his *māyā*. He is not an actor playing the part of himself, but a circus performer standing beside or behind the curtains.

Krishna in **IV** manifests himself before Arjuna as an actor playing the *role of a person named Krishna, and not of god Krishna*: and that person, named Krishna, is, *as a person*, as real as any other protagonist in the plot of the Mahabharata, whereas the brahman-boy in **VII** is, as a person, as unreal and artificial as the body created by magical power (*nimitta-kāya*) which the Buddha sent to preach to the villagers or the townsfolk, while his 'real' body (*samā-kāya*), but not person, remained in the assembly of ascetics.

§2

An intermediary position of 'person' between sentient being and ātman

Here we come across an interesting and purely mythological circumstance, to wit: as according to both **VII** by implication and **IV** explicitly, Self (*ātman*) is definitely uncreated, existing before time in the beginningless universe ['there was no time when you or any of these warriors did not exist...' said Krishna to Arjuna, referring to their *ātman*]*—so a person (puruṣa* in the Bhagavadgita) is, though by implication only, also uncreated. Although, of course, and speaking only of a given concrete person, e.g., Indra or Arjuna, it can certainly be said that 'person' *emerges* at a certain time, and in a certain place, i.e., in a concrete animate being human or divine. Then 'person' may continue to exist in an animate being human or divine or eventually disappear—this time together with one's human-ness and, therewith,

one's 'animate being-ness'. So, we might say that in contrast to *ātman* a person is temporal, though it cannot be viewed as mortal in the same sense as an animate being. Vishnu and Shiva showed Indra his mortality as a person only in a conventional sense—that is, when one identifies a person with an animate being, which is natural given Indra's gigantic life-span. So, in the final analysis and using binary oppositions, we might say that person and self are opposed to animate being as 'the uncreated to the created', while Self is opposed to person and animate being as the a-temporal to the temporal. Most important, however, is that Self is *always* opposed to animate being while person may *shift* from one opposition to another, for his is always an intermediate position, mythological *par excellence*.

And indeed, neither *ātman* nor *jīva*, as such, is in itself, mythological, for, as already stated, mythology starts with a situation, or the knowledge of a situation, where one figures as another or something as something else or, for that matter, where there is a knowledge that transcends habitual oppositions of the type 'man-god', 'body-mind', 'natural-supernatural', etc. Krishna in **IV** and Vishnu in **VII** would be no more mythical than the Hegelian absolute idea, if they did not figure as something which defies the epistemological certainty of a binary opposition. This also applies to the position of a complete ascetic, *muni*.

§3.

Persons and 'not yet persons'; Brahma as a backdrop to the scene of the mythical plot

No plot, whether mythological or not, can be conceived without a person (potential or actual) as its protagonist and without the interplay of knowledges of persons and about persons. The plot in **IV** is a typical example of a mythological situation where God Krishna acting, or better, *enacting* the person of Krishna Vasud-eva—let us not forget in this connection, that an actor does not play his own person in a play—does not play the person of God Krishna the Absolute. But he appears as if he were a human and a person in order to meet face to face another person, Arjuna. It is this 'as if he were' manifested in a charioteer that makes possible a contact of a simple man and *not yet* a person, with the transcendental God of the Meta-Universe. In contrast to this in **VII**, it is God-creator Brahma—whose place is also intermediary on the strength of his transcending his creation—who intercedes with totally transcendental Vishnu that he should send his brahman-boy phantom

that would come into contact with not yet a person, a simple god Indra. As for Brahma, he, as the creator, still *is* a person, due to which he *cannot* be, or become, a supreme transcendental god, no creator can. Within such a mythological scheme the creator is always derivative (as we see in VII.6) and never an Absolute, for he is bound by the function of creation. That is why in VII Brahma provides the backdrop against which the mythical plot of a communication of divine (i.e., Vishnu's) knowledge is evolved.

§4

*'Person-ness' is reduced to human image,
ātman is not*

Let us compare again our Puranic passage with the beginning of the Bhagavadgita. In our Puranic episode Vishnu reveals to Indra his (Indra's) mortality. Vishnu, in the guise of a young brahman, addresses Indra as a person to be who does not know that his 'person-ness' is transient as manifested by definition in an animate being or, shall we say, animate beings. But, of course, practically, while addressing Indra as a person named 'Indra', he is simply explaining to him that as Indra—and there is no person in him other than Indra—he will die; however long his lifespan, he will die in the end. So, in fact, Vishnu explained to him his transience not only as a person but as an animate being intrinsically connected with him as a person and taxonomically called 'God', given of course, that his image though he is a god remains symbolically human, because the idea of 'person-ness' is inherent in and reducible to a human image and name (it does not matter whose—a god's, a man's, or an ascetic's). Whereas in the case of the Bhagavadgita Krishna, though addressing Arjuna as a person called 'Arjuna', explained to him that he was *ātman* and immortal as *ātman*, and his mortality as a person did not matter in the context of God's teaching. This is the main difference between the two situations, for Vishnu did not explain to Indra that he is *ātman*, which is clearly beyond the pale of the situation described in the Puranic episode. Or we may say that Indra being too simple a god was not considered suitable for such an atmanic explanation, or we may say that the whole Puranic episode was not about *ātman* but about person. All this provided that in both cases such a revelation was made and could be made only to a *person*, for the very fact that god speaks to one makes one a person *par excellence*, even if one were not a person before such a revelation. In fact 'person-ness' is implied by the divine address by name. So a person

can be given a revelation by God in more than one way but is always a person by that very fact.

§5

*Asceticism as the way of transformation; a person as
'name' and 'choice'; 'too early' of Indra versus 'too
late' of Arjuna*

The next step is to establish a broader framework within which such a person exists and acts. In the case of **VII**, what we have here is a series of animate beings through which one had passed before becoming Indra and will pass after ceasing to be Indra. In the case of **IV**, it was *ātman* which passed through innumerable animate beings, its clothes, dresses, shells, nests, so to speak, to find in the end its last and final abode in Krishna, and to stop thereby being an animate being or for that matter a person. The situation is indeed utterly intricate, and, in my opinion, not yet dealt with properly by modern and pre-modern scholars.

Now we are facing the third step whereby this transformation is achieved, which in the case of Indra was natural and spontaneous, but in the case of Arjuna totally conscious and yogic. It is significant that in both cases, though in two totally different ways, it is through asceticism, and in both cases we have it spontaneously arising. Soon after having been shown the parade of ants Indra wanted to become an ascetic, that is, to stop building and rebuilding his celestial city and to stop making love to his spouse, and in a similar way Arjuna in our second case decided to stop fighting. In both cases asceticism went against one's own nature, *svabhāva*, as man or god, and in both cases they were shown that, simply speaking, they were not prepared to become ascetics. In the Parade of Ants it was the intervention of Indra's wife that prevented him from becoming an ascetic, and of the divine priest who persuaded him to go on with his kingly and marital duties; while in the Bhagavadgita Krishna persuaded Arjuna to carry on fighting. There is an absolute parallelism between the plots in **IV** and **VII** though the content of the teaching is different. These are, indeed, two bold attempts to become an ascetic. In Arjuna's case it was far too late for Arjuna to become an ascetic, for Krishna undoubtedly knew that Arjuna was going to disappear in a short time. While in Indra's case it was rather too early; Indra's natural potencies had not been exhausted. What is particularly interesting here, while speaking of asceticism, is that in both cases we see it as *by implication* opposed to ritual, though figuring side by side with Vedic rituals: the *tapas* in the Puranas

practised by gods and men figures as that which not only serves to accumulate the supernatural power of *tapas* but also to carry one beyond the confines of one's phenomenal world.

Another thing which is inherently connected with asceticism is the knowledge given by Vishnu and Shiva to Indra, which enabled him to understand himself as a person and a mortal animate being and which, in the case of Arjuna, enabled him to understand himself as a person and immortal *ātman*. In both cases it allowed them to transcend their respective natures and to go beyond their respective phenomenal worlds. This they were unable to do, but what they were enabled to do was to understand the possibility of *choice*, for the very notion of person implies the power, capacity and capability of making a choice. Name and choice determine a 'person' in both our texts.

§6

Knowledge and ritual

It is in the Upanishads that we have a complete absolutization of knowledge, where knowledge of *ātman-brahman* was made practically equal to *ātman-brahman* itself, to wit: if you know that, then you are that. In the Bhagavadgita we have a very different situation: though knowledge, as in the Upanishads, is used instead of ritual, or opposed to ritual, it figures, again, as a general instruction which you may or may not use but which you can *choose*. As in any full-fledged initiatory ritual you pass through ritual death to become immortal, so in the context of divine knowledge to become immortal you have to pass through such knowledge that is equal in strength and effect to the ritual of death. The version of asceticism proposed by Krishna in the Bhagavadgita reflects the new tendency that became prevalent between the 4th and 6th century B.C., the tendency to *inner asceticism* distancing itself from the outer form of ritual, a kind of anti-ritual, or 'instead of ritual'. The realization of yourself in terms of immortal *ātman* in an asceticism is akin to ritual death, where you see in yourself two different things: that which dies, weeps, enjoys, suffers, etc., and that which is alien to all this, immortal and infinite.

That is where knowledge coincides with the ritual. But there is a difference: in ritual the actual performance may be late, long and costly, needing several persons and complex preparations, whereas knowledge is transmitted quickly. Knowledge as intrinsically connected to choice, as an opportunity to choose, and as an impulse to fulfil that which is fulfillable, whenever given. Knowledge that has its application only in

relation to itself, i.e., in and to *ātman*, and which knows of no other application.

§7

*From the ontological to the psychological; the notion
of svabhāva*

Now we pass to the individual characteristics of the protagonists of **VII** and the mythological correlates of these characteristics. Let us start with Vishvakarman. Vishvakarman, who acted as the catalyst of the plot in **VII**, the divine architect and supernatural builder of celestial mansions, manifests the universal centrifugal tendency (by definition pertaining to the *guṇa rajas*), the tendency of creation and expansion. But this is so only if we look at our situation from a merely cosmological point of view, and then the same tendency can be seen as predominant in Indra and Brahma too.

If, however, we look at it from the point of view of the created universe of Brahma alone, i.e., within the realm of animate beings with their vertical hierarchy (shown in our classificatory scheme above), this centrifugal tendency will always be seen as *limited* by one's status as an animate being of a certain kind as well as specified and modified by one's *individual* mental characteristics (*svabhāva*). It is the last that became an actual fact in the story and a part of the plot on the level of microcosm of a *person*. For only a person, and not an animate being, *can know* that he is an animate being or a Self, and only a person, and not a Self, can act in the story and be a protagonist in the plot while knowing it. [To act or to be a protagonist for a soul or Self is possible only when, as already mentioned, it acts through or as an intermediary or a substitute, such as the brahman-boy or the muni in **VII**, a charioteer in **IV**, or a kind of messenger or carrier, as in the Egyptian *Conversation of a Man with his Soul* (where the carrier is the Divine Ass, Jai).] On the other hand, our hermeneutical procedure allows us to see something—which is extraneous physically to a protagonist in the plot—as his Self or soul, usually by way of a metaphor or a symbol. So, as I noted above, both in **IV** and in the Babylonian *Conversation of a Man with his Slave* a charioteer symbolizes soul, etc. A symbol here can also be regarded as being the *universal thing*—Self, soul, or the Highest Knowledge—and not necessarily that which 'represents' them.

§8

*Two mental tendencies: finite and infinite as
manifested respectively in Vishvakarman and Indra;
the notion of 'psychism'*

It is in the protagonists of **VII** that two mental tendencies are revealed which, though they can easily be reduced to individual differences regarding the predominance of one of the three *guṇas* in one's mind, become the *mental* or *psychical* trends distinguishing one person from another. For, as already noted, if any two *ātman*s are, as such, equal in their characteristics, and any two animate beings belonging to the same taxonomic class are equal as animate beings, no person can be equal to another person by the very definition of person-ness. Subjectively, knowledge of one's difference from another is always about *mind* or *psyche*, about differences in motivations and intentions even if the last may lead to the same external results in two or more persons, i.e., in the same actions or words. Here I adopt a term proposed by Professor Igor Smirnov from Konstanz to denote the sum total of all actual and possible differences of one mind from another—*psychism*. The idea of psychism, however, figures here only as that which is already described, a part of the content of a text, as that which denotes the mental differences that have their own *mythological* meaning, however 'natural' they may be. In fact their *psychological* meaning is always secondary in any mythological context. That is why, as we see it in **IV**, one's sum total of mental trends is not only 'natural' ('one's own nature', *svabhāva*), but also, and in the first place, that which it *must* be (i.e., 'one's own *dharma*, *svadharma*).

The first psychist tendency can be described as a tendency to *finiteness* and is shown by Vishvakarman who figures as the executor of the architectural plans of Indra who, in his turn, is a kind of sub-creator to the creator, Brahma. All three are *actors*, *agents* acting within their respective spheres of creation: Indra's celestial capital, the world of gods, and the Brahma-Universe. So, as we see in the beginning of **VII**, Vishvakarman wants to build, but he wants to start, continue and finish doing it, as Somerset Maugham with the plot of a short story, but unlike Maugham he was not the 'author' in the real sense of the word: his was an intention, inherent in his nature, to build but not to imagine the forms, design and plan. So, as Roger Sherman pointed out, Vishvakarman is in relation to Indra what action is in relation to thinking, or hands in relation to mind, because Indra's is a tendency to infinity.

§9

Two levels of infinity; Indra's state of mind and the need for instruction

Let us put ourselves in Indra's position: his was imagining, and his image was all that he could at that moment conceive of, but when completed, he created another image, and so on ad infinitum.

While Vishnu's imagination was as it was. It was infinite, limitless at every moment and in every point, and there was no tendency in him, for there was no mind. Thus infinity is expressed here on two different levels, that of Indra and that of Vishnu, otherwise there would be no need of transmission of the highest knowledge, which assumed its exposition in the Parade of Ants.

This was needed to establish another dimension to Indra who, at that point at least, became partly admitted to a domain of Vishnu's infinity, which contained billions of other dimensions.

After that, poor Indra became increasingly melancholic due to lack of time. ('What is left of my life would not exceed 200,000,000 years! Wouldn't it be better to become an ascetic?'). So Indra speedily started practising *tapas* etc., and his wife, feeling neglected, ran to the wisest of gods, Brihaspati. He told her to be patient: Indra is Indra, sex will get him back sooner or later. ('I'll provide some sex manuals and he will soon come to be his normal self.') In this conclusive sub-episode, we can discern a tendency to finiteness. And this tendency assumed, not by chance, the form of a sexual drive which is opposed to ascetism, as to a kind of *finite activity* too. For ascetic endeavour, though aimed at infinite goals, is, in itself, phenomenally finite. This is one of the 'ascetical paradoxes'.

§10

'Finite' and 'infinite' as two complementary tendencies; the dualism of svabhāva and svadharma

Indra's business was to be king and to sport with his wife which was regarded, not as particularly 'good', but as a 'proper', dharmic thing, according to the Bhagavadgita. But is it possible to make these, as it were, contradictory tendencies compatible in one and the same person? In **VII** they are neither compatible nor contradictory. They simply exist—without necessarily coexisting—on two levels, Indra's and Dharma's. For, as we see in **VII**, the Dharma understood in its finite aspect contains something essential to all finite beings. But at the same time it denies

the idea of finiteness: *each being is and is not finite!* So if we ask, was Indra instructed properly?—the answer would be that he was and he was not. He stopped his grandiose projects, and stopped trying to be an ascetic—both edges of the same infinity. He returned to the limits of his own nature (*svabhāva*) and of his own dharma (*svadharma*, in **IV**). But what of infinity, then? Indra retained his nature which represents the whole level of finite beings. And that is why universal instruction is both necessary and unachievable, because you cannot make the infinite comprehensible in finite terms and to finite beings.

[The dualism of finite and infinite here is different from the usual *religious* opposition between finite and infinite as we see it in Mediterranean cults and cultures. The latter is easily reduced to another fundamental opposition, that between creator and creation: the Creator is separated *ontologically* from that which he created. Brahma, on the other hand, is near to his creation and implicated in it. In the Judaeo-Christian religions, the idea of ‘creator’ is almost synonymous with the idea of infinity, while in Indian terms the creator is *almost* synonymous with finiteness. (In Gnosticism we have the first attempts in this region to deal with fundamental origins: the duplication of Adams, Eves, Jesuses, demiurges can be seen as an attempt to approach the Indian model.) So, the separation of infiniteness and finiteness is absolute in Mediterranean religions, while in Indian religions it is relative.]

§11

Indra as the universe; the four levels of description in VII, corresponding to four gods

What is the main object of description in this passage? I think it is Indra. Because the whole Universe is described here through him. In fact, he is the Universe here. But it does not mean that the Universe is ‘produced’ from Indra through a series of extrapolations. It is contained in him. He features as a lens through which the whole Universe is manifested. The whole context of **VII** within its narrational frame can be described hierarchically on four levels: Vishvakarman, Indra, Brahma, Vishnu:

(1) Vishvakarman is described, first, as a level of action, which is implied in his name: *viśva* means ‘all’ or ‘concrete wholeness’, karma means ‘action’, though while the action is his, the purpose is Indra’s.

(2) Indra’s is the level of *pure intentionality* (speaking phenomenologically). For, the first level is that of naturality, while the second is that of supernaturality, as the level at which the will is

manifested. The whole of **VII** can be described as an explanation of the *nature of the universe in terms of intentionality*.

(3) The third level is that of Brahma. Here the opposition of action to intention does not work any more. What we are dealing with is the idea of *instruction* which in itself is supernatural. This level synthesizes in itself all psychological oppositions, because it is the level of the whole Brahma-Universe for the sake of which instruction is given by Vishnu.

(4) Finally the fourth level, that of Vishnu, is the level where time-space uniqueness as well as time-space repeatability is discarded because he stays, as it were, outside the whole Universe of modifications, creations, appearances, outside the whole cycle of all time-space, where all events take place. It can even be suggested that we are dealing here with a Universe where there are no events at all. Each fact and event described in this episode may assume its interpretation on each of the four levels. Each subsequent higher level synthesizes all events of the previous, *though we may say that the fourth is an extra-level*. Because Vishnu may be looked at as *Viśvarūpa* (i.e., in his cosmic form), but cannot be seen as the whole Universe because he transcends it.

§12

Transformation and transformability: the four spheres corresponding to four gods; certainty and uncertainty of transformation

If we look at **VII** from the angle of transformation and transformability we start with Vishvakarman whose function is *mere action* and move to Indra who can even *know* if duly instructed. Then, there is Brahma, who represents the frontier between the transformable and the untransformable universe. After that appears Shiva whose place is uncertain because I do not know it, there is not enough to go on here. (Note that his chest hair is like the ants.) Indra (as everybody else) is interchangeable or substitutable. Everything above Indra's level is, in this respect, either uncertain, or quite certain negatively, in terms of transformation and transformability.

Four spheres constitute the whole Meta-Universe:

- (1) The isolated sphere of Vishvakarman with karma in the background;
- (2) Indra's sphere of transformation comprising all animated beings;
- (3) Brahma's sphere of 'questionable' transformability;
- (4) Vishnu's (and Shiva's?) sphere of transformational uncertainty.

[The idea that transformation implies (apart from the mechanisms, which we ignore here), is that it can be reduced absolutely logically, in the Husserlian sense, to enumeration of the objects which can be changed into one another.]

§13

The modes of transformation; Indra as a general denominator and Brahma as the limit of transformability

We have now identified the spheres existent prior to the possibility of transformation (i.e., 3 and 4). For, according to this episode, we may conclude, with some degree of certainty, that the last three gods cannot be transformed into one another for one very fundamental reason, namely that they *possess, individually taken, their own modes of transformation not overlapping each other*. From this it may follow, mythologically, that *the individuality of the Hindu Gods is established especially by their particular modes of transformation*.

If we consider the Parade of Ants from the point of view of triple mythological pattern, we may imagine the whole picture given in this episode as the Universe consisting of Vishvakarmans, Indras, and Brahmas. Nobody else, in effect, figures in it. But each living being can be thought of as Indra. The last figures here as a sort of shifting substitute, general denominator of all living or animate beings of whatever status. Everybody can be imagined as Indra! If ants can, why not us? But can we say the same of Brahma? And another question: If you and I, or a tiger, happened to be Brahma, then why not Shiva? and then, why not Vishnu?—No, *it would upset the hierarchy*—such is the answer. And again, could an Indra become a Brahma within the context of VII? Leaving aside us, snakes, etc., what about Gods themselves? Could they change into each other—No!

The degree of freedom in this passage remains on the level of Indra; we all belong to this level, where Vishvakarman is fixed in his situation representing our own isolated tendency to finitude. Such is the *mythology* in the *text*: no other reason—though *philosophically*, many other things are possible.

§14

*The phenomenon of 'exposition' in IV and VII; its
psychological and mythological meanings; exposition
neutralizes psychology*

The parade of ants in **VII** and Krishna's demonstration of himself as the whole cosmos (*Viśvarūpa*) in **IV**, are two examples of a mythological phenomenon which I called 'exposition'. The elementary semantic structure of 'exposition' can be described in the following way:

(a) *Psychologically* it means that an event [E] (parade of ants, Muni's chest, Krishna's universal form) is exposed to the perception (mind, etc.) of a person [P] (Indra, Arjuna, etc.) either by somebody or something [O], which is *other* than [P] (as in our case, by Vishnu, Shiva, and Krishna) or by [E] itself [O_E]. At the same time, and not infrequently, it is either [O] that is exposed in the event, [E₀], as Krishna in **IV** (and particularly in **IV.3**) or even [P] himself, as Indra *as ants* in the Parade of Ants, [E_P].

(b) *Mythologically*, however, exposition denotes a situation when a person [P] is exposed to an event [E] in such a way that he has no choice between perceiving E and not perceiving it. Which means it is [O] or [O_E] that has already determined the situation and not [P], or [P]'s capacity of perception, or his good luck. Or, to put it another way, however different the mental states, motivations and intentions of various persons may be, these differences will be neutralized by [E]. Exposition tends to ignore psychism and, thereby, person-ness implied by this psychism, so that a person [P] is, as it were, returned back to his 'pre-personal' condition of uniformity of perception with other 'non-persons', for mental uniformity means 'no-psychism' and therefore, 'no-person', because, a person understood as 'choice and psychist difference' of which he is, in principle, aware, would have, through exposition, to change into another person, or at least, to *know* that such a change has been offered to him as a possibility which, *after* exposition, he may or may not choose to realise.

§15

*Exposition as a transforming factor cancelling one's
person-ness*

Under the category of [E] can be put very many phenomena which we call 'religious'—particularly those which in Indian contexts assumed the name 'intermediate states of consciousness', as well as very many

functionally diverse transic mental states in Indian and other religions. Irrespective of whether [E] is induced by a god as in **IV** and **VII**, or by a shaman in a patient as in a shaman's act of healing, or self-induced as in Buddhist states of *dhyāna*, or in a shaman during his healing procedure, or both as in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo-Todol)*, or uncertain as in some dreams or dream-like states—in all these and very many other instances there is one main factor that totally dominates the situation: as soon as a person finds himself in it, i.e., is exposed to [E], he cannot leave it until the exposition is over and his initial mental state has been changed. And it is the factor which, though undeniably related to human mentality, links an 'exposed' person to the realm, itself intermediate too, of the *impersonality* of myth. Indra, deeply perturbed by the vision of many other Indras, Arjuna terrified at the vision of the universe as Krishna, the dying person in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* terrorized by the threatening shapes of the Wrathful Deities—they are all placed by the supernatural face to face with that which combines, in the event of exposition, their own human 'psychist' subjectivity with the objectivity of the supernatural. Or, to put it more phenomenologically, the *idea* of exposition can be reduced to *seeing another as yourself* within a situation where you cannot help doing it—and this is a myth to all intents and purposes.

§16

A speculative after-thought

The cosmological picture presented in **IV** and **VII** may call for some parallels and associations, however vague, with philosophical and scientific ideas of this century. A Meta-Universe mentioned in **VII** is *without time—because* ('because' here is *my* speculation) it has no events (i.e., no changes), no persons to be conscious of them, and no coming into being or going out of it, *for* there is nobody to witness them ('for' is also mine). Its God (*Mahā Viṣṇu*) is here a mere way of describing it; using a slightly dated terminology of Protestant theological critique, He cannot even be termed 'deist', let alone 'theist', and seems to be the tautological denotation of Meta-Universe itself. And if Vishnu (say, a Vishnu!) is, though unobservable, still observing *his* universe, the Meta-Universe cannot be thought of in terms of observation for the last implies not only the time of observation but, more importantly, *another or outside place* which cannot exist there by definition.

This may well invite the speculation that, if thought of from the point of view of our phenomenal (i.e., a Brahma's) universe, the mythological triad—Brahma-Universe, Vishnu-Universe, and Meta-Universe—can be seen as analogous to the three phases of one 'being' ('being' is used for lack of a better word): the phase of Self, the phase of person, and the phase of sentient being. The Self observes but cannot be observed ('absolute observation'), the person observes and can be observed, the sentient being is observed but cannot observe ('absolute objectness'). The Meta-Universe of Maha-Vishnu can be, however conjecturally, thought of as pure non-observability not only because there are no events *in* it but, in the first place, because its absolute objectness precludes the possibility of anything, or anybody, outside it and observing it.

The triple scheme of universes in **VII**, if looked at as the content of a narration *within* the plot, can be easily seen as a cosmogonic picture where the Mega-Universes of Vishnus emerge in the space of the Meta-Universe, the Brahmas arise from the Mega-Universes, the phenomenal universes are created by Brahmas, and the Indra-universes come into being as concrete acts (or 'units', so to speak) of Brahma's creation. However, if observed as *one event* or *situation* of instruction ('exposition') made for Indra's and Vishvakarman's sake the picture would be seen as a *merely spatial configuration the elements of which do not either generate or determine one another*. Such a point of observation may, then, allow for three purely speculative suggestions: (1) that it is this configuration as *a whole* that determines the existence of these elements and their relation to each other; (2) that it is this particular juncture of events in the plot of **VII**—shall we call it 'Indra's stubbornness and Vishvakarman's despair'—that should be thought of as determining the exposition of the spatial configuration of universes; (3) that our point of observation itself, together with all other actual or possible points of observation, may be thought of as that which constitutes one other mythological 'sub-space' of the 'meta-space' of which the situation of the Parade of Ants and a 'cosmological' exposition of the universes in this plot would be two other 'sub-spaces'. From this, of course, it also follows that it is the fact of *our* observing and interpreting this configuration that may have determined its being *as it is*. But that is a mere specimen of mythic philosophy rather than of a philosophy of myth. [About this see Lecture One, 6.]

Let us ask, then: can a myth (*muthos*) be understood and explained, as I am trying to do now, by *logos*? Yes, it can, but only provided that

we are able to understand and explain the latter in terms of the former too.

ADDENDA

A

THE THEME OF DEATH: TIME, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND SELF

§1

Thematic character of death

In all our examples death undoubtedly features as the central event of the plot and the turning point or axis of its mythological structure.⁷ For, although ‘natural’ and ‘atomary’ in itself, death has a *special* mythological quality which attracts to it other special events, in combination with which it forms complex ‘extra-ordinary’ or supernatural situations (see Lecture Four, 2 § 5–6). However, apart from figuring as an event in a series of events in a plot, death presents itself—to the curious mythologist and to the protagonists in the plot alike—not only as a concrete fact or event, but also as a general and basic *idea*. General, because of its postulated attributability to the *whole* class of actually or potentially *thinking beings* (*jīva*, *sattva*), and basic, because it serves as the basis of interpretation and understanding of a number of other ideas, in a given passage, text, or a group of texts. Moreover, in our passages death assumes its *thematic* character, that is, it becomes that to which the content of text itself intentionally directs the consciousness of the reader or the hearer, and informs their perception of the text.⁸ The theme of death can be seen, in our passages, as a cluster of relations established between the idea (and image) of death and some other ideas (and images), to wit: ‘time’, ‘Self’, ‘body’, ‘mind’, ‘animate being’, ‘person’, and ‘consciousness’.

⁷ The word ‘death’ is used here only and exclusively in the sense of ‘one’s death’, and in no other sense literal or metaphorical.

⁸ It would be better to say that the theme of a text *may* inform its perception in a certain way and to a certain degree. It might, then, be said that a story or a tale can have only one plot but more than one theme.

§2

Death and time

Prior to discussing Time in connection with and within the theme of Death, we must touch again, very cursorily, on the character of ‘normal’ or ‘durational’ time in **III**. The normal time implied in the plot here (T_1) is the same as the normal time of one’s life (Pandu’s in this case). It is normal in the sense of how one—Pandu, or the narrator, or I, for that matter—normally *perceives* it, or, more precisely, it is the *time of perception*, a mental time related to mind as one of its functions or fictions. This kind of time is perceived as unilinear, as a kind of flow or stream directed from the past, through the present, toward the future.⁹ Moreover, even when supernaturally compressed (T_2^{Sn}) as in **IV**, in the case of Arjuna and of **Samjaya**, the narrator, who is endowed with supernatural knowledge, it remains ‘normal’ in the sense of its continuity and one-directedness of perception. In other words, the time of the sequence of events in **III** and **IV**, as well as the time of their perception and subsequent communication are, in fact, *mental* and share the properties of mind (*manas*). This is the time *within which* one’s death may figure as an event, and which may assume its historical or quasi-historical character as one of the possible extensions of its ‘mental-ness’, so to speak.¹⁰ And here we are returning to what was already discussed in Lecture One.

⁹ All this, of course, is not to say that this kind of normal perception of time is universal. There are other modes of the normal perception of time in other mythologies and cultures.

¹⁰ I am fully aware that this paragraph is badly in need of a phenomenological explanation, however elementary. *Perception of time* here—including the

§3.

Time as death; Time—centre of the Mega-Universe

We read in **III.2**, that ‘... mind of Pandu...crazed by Time itself, which churned his senses...and he succumbed to the Law of Time in the embrace of his wife.’ Time here figures not only as a synonym of death, it not only means death in the sense of the end of one’s flow of ‘mental’ time—far more than that: Time, in this passage, is a kind of *thing* or *entity*, and not that in which some other things or events happen in their temporal sequence. If anything, it stays rather than moves, though in its *relative* movement it moves in the direction opposite to that of the ‘normal’ time of one’s life or the course of events in the plot. Furthermore, Time is opposed to ‘normal’ or ‘mental’ time (or the time of one’s perception) as the factor that makes the conscious non-conscious. In both **III.2** and **IV.2**, it is described as death but without the transformational or intermediate aspect of the latter. Or, rather, death is described as the

‘historical’ sequentiality of events within the framework of a perception of time—comes under the rubric of one’s *transcendental subjectivity*. Or, speaking simply, all of us, King Pandu, the ascetic Kindama, the narrator Vaishampayana, and I, had we come together and discussed the time of events in the plot of **III** and the time of the narration of **IV**, we would undoubtedly have agreed as to their duration as well as to the sequence and composition of events in them. Because, as regards perception of time, though mental as an element of mental activity, it would always be observed by the phenomenological observer as already informed by the ‘background ideas’ which, themselves, are non-individual by definition. Contrary to this, the *time of perception* here would be a notion introduced by the phenomenological observer himself, and with the strongest intimation that it might, indeed, be very different in different persons, situations, and plots. For, as a notion, it suggests individuality and variety of perception, as in the case of **Samjaya** in **IV, 1**, and is objective in its character by virtue of being based on the ‘objective’ (though ‘psychological’) knowledge of an external observer.

gigantic, black,¹¹ ‘anti-mind body’ of Time, which swallows persons after having weakened their reasons, churned their senses, and blunted their consciousness; the more non-conscious one becomes, the quicker one gravitates towards that enormously massive Death-Time centre of the Mega-Universe of Vishnu:

‘As moths on the wing ever faster will aim
for a burning fire and perish in it,
Just so do these men increasing their speed
Make haste to your mouths to perish in them.
You are greedily licking your lips to devour
These worlds entire with your flickering mouths:
Your dreadful flames are filling with fire,
And burn to its ends this universe, Vishnu!’
—says Arjuna to ‘Krishna as the Mega-Universe’ (in **IV,2,3**).

§4

*Is ‘Death as Time’ conscious of itself? Krishna as the
triad ‘Death-Time-Destiny’*

Then a question arises, is Death itself- understood as ‘anti-time’ opposite to the directional flow of ‘normal’ or ‘mental’ time—conscious of itself and of the Universe? Krishna the Lord answers the question:

‘I am Time grown old to destroy the world,
Embarked on the course of world annihilation
Except for yourself none of these warriors will survive...
I myself have doomed them ages ago:
Be merely my hand in this, Left-handed Archer!
...Slay them, my victims...destroy them and tarry not!’

So he, or rather It, is not any more ‘Krishna the Man,’ smiling, with radiant face and ‘four-armed form’, Arjuna’s charioteer and very good friend, but the triad of Death, Time, and Destiny. For—and this is the

¹¹ M.Mayrhofer writes: Kāla, ‘death’ is, naturally, the word for ‘time’ [*Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, Bd.I, Heidelberg, Winter, 1953, p. 203]. That Kāla also means ‘black’ is explained by him as a case of homonymic convergence with another word of Dravidian origin.

crucial point in our understanding of the theme of Death—in terms of time Death can be reduced to two consciousnesses: the consciousness of Time at the end of time, as the final annihilation of the universe ('I am Time grown old...'), and the consciousness of that *dharmic design* (or Destiny) which had preceded ('ages ago') the beginning of the 'normal' (or cyclic) time, when Vishnu had doomed them. This, in fact, brings us, again, to the conjecture that, as an idea, time is reduced to death, and Time to Death, not the other way round, or, more, precisely, to that kind of consciousness which is styled 'death consciousness' (as in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and some other Tibetan Buddhist sources).

§5

Death and Consciousness: time and Time are two different consciousnesses of death

In all our Indian passages all that *one knows* of oneself, that not only informs one's consciousness¹² but makes it known to other protagonists in the plot, the narrator, and the observer—all this appears on the surface of the text, so to speak, either at (or just before) the moment of death, or in connection with death past, present or future. Still, it is not that we become conscious of death in terms of the information we are given about it, but that this very act of consciousness takes place in the myth in a situation determined by death.¹³ In **III** the Rishi dies, the King is cursed and then dies; in **IV** Dhritarashtra is told of his son's death,

¹² 'One's consciousness' here is, as it were, opposed to 'another' and not to 'another's consciousness' for the reason that the latter may or may not be imputed to another person, as, for instance, in the case of the 'non-person-ness' of Vishnu in **VII** or of Krishna, in his cosmic form, in **IV**.

¹³ Determined, in the sense of *theme*, though not necessarily in the sense of a plot.

Arjuna does not want to kill his enemies, then he is told that they will be killed anyway while he, alone, is spared (temporarily?)¹⁴ and that the whole universe will be destroyed—after that he sets about killing them; in **VII** Indra is told of his own future death, etc. But, again, in Time used in this sense, the agonizing Rishi and hitherto ‘optimistic’ Indra at the end of his enormous life-span shall disappear from the surface of their respective plots, just as Bhishma, Karna, and other great warriors shall dive into the bottomless fanged mouths of Vishnu-Death-Time for ever—reincarnation or no-reincarnation, karma or no-karma. For this is quite another death reduced to quite another consciousness—*consciousness of the end of one’s person*, and not a consciousness of one’s transformation into another or one’s transition from one state (life, birth, etc.) to another. Because, in the case of this ‘personal’ death, it is only that *other* consciousness which can reflect on and be aware of, one’s ‘dying’ consciousness, i.e., one’s ‘normal’ death, as in the case of time it is that other consciousness of Time which can reflect on and be aware of, ‘normal’ time and its end.

§6

*Death-Consciousness as ‘another’—a mythological
postulate; thinking of oneself as another*

Death-Consciousness, however, not only witnesses the end of ‘one as a person’, but can be imagined as that to which personness itself is reduced or reducible. That is, a person as *one* consciousness, can be reduced to *another* or Death-Consciousness by way of the following mythological picture: when *another consciousness casts light on a spot in space and at a moment in time* [where it sees an animate being], *it makes it a person*. If you read this picture without ‘where it sees an animate being’, you will get a mythological postulate. Mythology here

¹⁴ So, if taken literally, the situation with Arjuna suggests that, while almost all other great warriors in the Mahabharata, ‘really’ died (‘swallowed by Time’), he, as Krishna’s beloved friend, went to Indra’s Paradise. This, in its turn, strongly suggests that we have two kinds of death here: one—final, in connection with Time, and another ‘transitional’, i.e., connected with reincarnation (although Arjuna, by implication, remained Arjuna in Indra’s Paradise, which may suggest the third possibility). Mythologically speaking, these two (or more) deaths are *synchronous* in a person until he stops being a person, i.e., either by becoming a Great Person (*Mahāpuruṣa*) or by final dissolution of his personness.

is a way of thinking—my own, for example—on the things which I have already singled out as ‘mythological’ using my very elementary hermeneutical procedure. Even if in offering this mythological postulate I consider it possible to subject it, in turn, to my further hermeneutical attempts—and, consequently, to convert it, as a way of my thinking, into another ‘singled out thing’, i.e., a mythology proper—my consciousness would remain the same and not another. This is what makes all attempts to *consciously* change oneself (i.e., one’s thinking) into an object of mythological investigation so dubious methodologically: *for one to think of oneself as another (i.e., ‘person’ or ‘dead’)—another consciousness is needed*, and not an additional reflexive operation. This can be taken here as a second, ‘meta-mythological’ postulate.

§7

Krishna and Vishnu as transcendental consciousness

It is to the idea of Death-Consciousness *as another consciousness* that the mythological phenomenon of somebody or something figuring as the consciousness of somebody else can be reduced. So, in **IV**, Krishna (who is consciousness of the universe, by definition) figures as *another consciousness* of Arjuna, and in **VII** Vishnu figures as another consciousness of Indra, etc. From the point of view of an external observer, another consciousness is *transcendental*, i.e., not pertaining to the sphere of perception (or, in some cases, to the universe) of those whose consciousness or personness it happens to be. In this sense Indra was not transcendental in relation to Vishvakarman; the King of Gods was—to use the metaphor of Roger Sherman—Vishvakarman’s *mind*, not another consciousness.¹⁵ Krishna was Arjuna’s other consciousness,

¹⁵ Self (or Soul, *ātman*), is transcendental whereas mind is definitely not. Using the Husserlean definition of ‘psychological subjectivity...yet transcendentalized by a transcendental-phenomenological reduction’, we may apply it to the Indian idea of mind (*manas*). Mind is natural-psychological and thus belongs to a body and to the world, both in the Upanishads and Husserl’s *Ideas*. *Ātman*, however, could hardly be deemed similar to, let alone the same as, Husserl’s ‘Ego of transcendental enquirer’. [Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*, trans. by W.R.Boyce Gibson, London, MacMillan, 1962 (1913), p. 8.]

though Arjuna had not realised it until Krishna exposed to him his Universal Form.¹⁶ And when realization came Arjuna cried:

‘If, thinking you friend, I have too boldly cried, “Yadava!
Krishna!
Come here, my good friend!”
Not knowing of this your magnificence...
If perchance I have slighted you—merely in jest—
In matters of sport, bed, seating, or meal...
I ask your indulgence, Immeasurable One!’

§8

*Two dualities—‘person/animate being’ and Self
(ātman)/body—as components of the idea of Death;
death as a complex phenomenon*

Two dualities mark the thematic composition of Death in **III**, **IV** and **VII**: ‘person/animate being’ and ‘Self (or soul)/body’. In the previous paragraphs person was considered outside its opposition to animate being and, as an idea, reduced to Death-Time-Consciousness losing, thereby, all the psychological traits and characteristics imputed or imputable to it. To understand Self and body as two separate entities we ought to put aside the assumption of their primary genuine separateness as two ideas different from or opposed to each other. I suspect—and this is strongly supported by a great variety of mythological plots and situations—that these two notions appear as separate and different in the process of reflexion on death as a *complex* phenomenon. That is, it is from the awareness of death as separation of a soul from a body that the idea of soul and body as separate appears, and not the other way round.

¹⁷

¹⁶ That is, Arjuna thought Krishna to be to him what Indra was to Vishvakarman.

¹⁷ ‘Appears’ here has no historico-mythological meaning whatsoever, but suggests the form, pattern and configuration of elements in a structure of consciousness, in the first place, and only after that, and no more than to an extent, the sequence of phases in a mythological thinking or of events in a mythological plot.

§9

Observer within the theme of death; ātman as eternal observer; Krishna in IV transcending ātman as the Self of the Universe

But here, in our thinking on death in the sense of Death, that is, Death-Time-Consciousness, we come across an unavoidable meta-mythological paradox,¹⁸ to wit: *as the Death of the Universe, on the cosmic level, so the Death of a Person, on the micro-cosmic level, are absolutely impossible in the absence of an external observer.* The external observer is an element of a structure of consciousness called 'Death-Time Consciousness', for he had known it, or it had been pre-existing in his consciousness, before normal time began, and will know it after normal time is ended.

The Selves (or souls), existing in the beginningless universe and changing their bodies (as worn out clothes or old nests) as they pass again and again through *death as transformation*, is one thing, but the named persons disappearing for ever, without trace, in Krishna's bottomless gullet, is quite another. For, in the first case, it is Self (*ātman*), the eternal observer (or witness, *caṅśin*) of his body and the world, who knows: 'I am not (my) body, I am not (my) mind'; whereas, in the second case, it is the transcendental Krishna who, transcending even his awesome Cosmic Form, Vishvarupa, says: 'Before the past began to exist had I doomed those [men] named so-and-so to be swallowed by Me [as Death-Time] within ten days [i.e., of their, "normal", time] from now!' Thus, in the first case, one's Self not only establishes the difference between itself and what is not itself, i.e., body and mind, but between body and mind too, at the *present* moment of death; while in the second case, the Self of the Universe, at the final moment of the Universal Dissolution and, as it were, from the timeless future of after time, establishes the crucial differences unseen by eyes human or divine, between the undying 'one as a Self' and the person who was named, in the 'before-time', as a man who will die before the end of time, his life's time, or time in general.

¹⁸ 'Meta' here stresses the fact of our thinking *on* mythology, and implies that we are still *outside* its *content*. 'Meta-mythological' means a specific character of our own thought which becomes, itself, mythological when it thinks on mythology. Or, if we accept Husserl's characterisation of *intentionality* as a 'consciousness of something', then in our case intentionality will be 'mythological thinking'.

§10

'Observer' as a structure of mythological consciousness

The eternal observer, within the theme of Death in our well-trodden Indian passages, makes possible a phenomenological reduction of 'one as many'—i.e., as 'body and Soul (or Self)', or as 'animate being and person', or as 'body, speech and mind' (in Buddhism), or as 'name (consciousness) and form (body?)'—to death, only because he, himself, is thought of, as it were, as 'one *in* many'. That means that all his changes and transformations are but *temporal manifestations* of that which there is in him a-temporally, non-temporally, synchronically co-existing with each other within one unchanging structure of consciousness, called 'death'. The mythology of death is but a case of manifestation of this structure in various events of a plot and in different knowledges of its protagonists.¹⁹

§11

A mythology of external observer; three cases: consciousness, memory and being

The reduction of the idea of death to the external observer as one of its basic elements does not preclude the observer from having a mythology of his own and from being a complex mythological structure of consciousness in its right, which could be very sketchily described in the following way:

¹⁹ My surmise is that one of the essential postulates of Upanishadic philosophy, 'I am not (or, *That*, i.e., Self is not) mind', has as its basis the old Kantian idea that mind cannot cognize itself (let alone *ātman*—as any Vedantic master of old would have added). There is nothing mythological whatsoever about this purely philosophical postulate. Mythology here begins only when and where 'person' enters on the stage. In our Indian texts, however, person appears, as I have already mentioned, as a result of my understanding of the relations between several other things, such as animate being, Self, name, etc.; that is, as the result of my own application of a non-Indian notion of person to that which *intentionally* might be understood as its approximation and analogue. For it is definitely a person who speaks to his soul in the Egyptian Dialogue of a Man with his Soul, while Arjuna *was made* a person to converse with Krishna.

(a) With respect to *consciousness*, an external observer can observe the universe, an event, or his own state of mind because he is conscious of himself and of his observation too. So in the last case he is an observer of himself as an observer, which suggests a kind of reflexive thinking that works *synchronically* with the thinking it is reflecting on. The ultimate case of such an observation of observation is when the observer's position is *absolute*, that is, when he is the Observer who cannot be observed by any other observer in the universe. And this is exactly the case with the Buddha (or an Arhat, or a Brahman) in **VIII** in the next Section, as it is with Krishna the Lord in **IV**.

(b) With respect to *memory*, the Observer remembers all that he has ever observed for, in his case, each 'act' of remembering synchronizes with and within itself each observed event together with that event's observation. Thus, in this case, we deal with *absolute memory* as that which is reduced to 'zero-time', that is, the non-existence of time-intervals between observed events as well as between observations. Everything takes place in a 'pure space' of consciousness outside both what we have called 'normal' or 'psychological' time and 'historical' time. This is, definitely, the case with Krishna and the Buddha, but not with Taliesin (**VI,4**) who was able to actualize his previous witnessing only *post factum*, that is, after he had acquired his knowledge or become conscious of himself as a pristine and eternal being.

(c) With respect to *being*—and this is where I have to shift *my* position, as an observer of *their* mythology—the Observer is thought of by me, and also knows himself, as entirely exempt from all the laws, rules, and factors determining that which he observes. This, however, is not to say that there can be no laws, rules, and factors determining his being, his observing included.²⁰ But if so, these laws, rules, and factors would have no direct relation at all to the events he is observing, or if they did then only *through* his observation. It is the last circumstance that brings us to the question of the *intermediate* position of an external observer in general and of the Observer in particular. Krishna is observing the universe he designs, rules, and dissolves, from the unknown Meta-Universe (as in **VII**), whereas the Buddha is observing the world of *samsara* from which he had withdrawn, from, as it were, the non-phenomenal interstices between phenomenal universes. In this

²⁰ It may be added, in this connection, that the idea that being conscious of an event is tantamount to being free from that which determines it, can be seen as one other mythological construction.

sense, the Buddha might be thought of as *mediating* between these universes with the final aim of their de-phenomenalization.

This is, in short, that to which a mythology of the external observer can be reduced.

B AN EVENT AND ITS FACTORS

§1

Three ways of explaining an event

An event (E) in a mythological text or passage may find its explanation in at least three different ways. First, when I, as an external observer, explain it on the basis of my own *general* knowledge of myths and of the forms and patterns of mythological situations. Second, when the knowledge within the text or group of texts, that is the *knowledge of an event*, allows me to explain a given event in the way actually used for such explanations in such texts. Third, when it is a given event that explains itself or contains the act of its own explanation being, thereby, an *event of knowledge*. Now, by combining the second and the third ways of explanation in our elementary hermeneutical procedure, and suspending our own general knowledge of what the myth is about, we will be able to reduce an event to a kind of intersection of its possible interpretations.

§2

Event as a point of departure; an event as a 'unit' of interpretation; an 'objective' mythology of events

This approach, when an event, and not a knowledge, is seen as a point of departure in a mythological investigation, suggests a new phenomenological position, to wit, when *an event is thought of as a unit of interpretation in the sense of the factors which may determine its existence, i.e., its happening or the ways of its happening*. From this position the factors to which an event is related as the determined is related to the determining would be deemed objective; objective in the sense that at the time when the event in question begins to be thought of, these factors have already been there—or have always been there, for that matter. Here we have a kind of 'objective' mythology where the position of the mythologist would be subjective by definition for an

event he has already chosen for his object of investigation will always be objective with respect to the factors determining his choice.

§3.

Religion and mythology; interpretation of events in the Dhammapada

Religion very often figures within an event and in the context of teaching which explains this event, religion included. [Then religion itself becomes subjective until reduced to factors determining it as an event or an element of an event.] Buddhism, in this respect, offers very many situations where religion (the worship of and meditation on the Buddha) is interpreted in the context, and in the sense of, the Dharma (the Teaching of Buddha). The following few verses from the Dhammapada suffice to show how the elements of religion are related to those of mythology within one structure of consciousness.

VIII.1. All dharmas²¹ are pristinely of mind, foremost of mind and mind-made.

If one speaks and acts with a corrupted mind, then suffering follows him just as the wheel (of a cart follows) the hoof of the ox...

If one speaks and acts with a purified mind, then happiness follows after him as a shadow [1–2].

2. (An Arhat) whose (mental) intoxicants are eliminated, who is indifferent to food,

Whose sphere is the void and the unconditioned liberation,

His path is untraceable, like (the path) of vultures in the sky [93].

An Arhat whose destination neither gods, nor gandharvas nor men know,

Who is devoid of (mental) intoxicants, him I call a Brahman [420].

3. If a man month after month for a hundred years should sacrifice a thousand times,

This is not worth one moment of worshipping

A person well-trained in meditation [106].

He who worships the Buddha, so worthy of worship, and his Hearers

Who have transcended the phenomenal world and overcome craving and sorrow...

—His merit cannot be measured by anybody [195–6].

²¹ Dharmas here, used in *plural*, denote all thoughts, all thinking, and all things and events, thought of or thinkable.

4. One who with the Dharma²² of equanimity and peacefulness leads others (to the Dharma),

He is called an Adherer of Dharma, a Guardian of Dharma and a Wise Man [257].

§4

Buddha as mediator; the idea of 'thinking object' as a mythological idea

These passages, taken almost randomly from the Dhammapada, are good material for a lesson in *objective mythology*; that is, not only do we have a familiar Indian mythological classificatory scheme containing gods, semi-gods, men, ascetics, etc., but also that which totally neutralizes it, the Arhats, Brahmans, and, finally, the Buddha. The last *mediates* between the phenomenal world and the Dharma.²³ This mediation suggests, in its turn, one other, objective mythological pattern. Objective, because, while neutralizing the world of *samsara* with its mythology, the Buddha establishes, from the point of view of the external observer,²⁴ a broader hierarchical classificatory scheme that includes in itself the former scheme as one of its elements or particular cases, and follows the pattern of the former scheme. So, in the final analysis, an objective mythology can be reduced here to the idea that one not only thinks a certain (mythological) way of some (or all) things and events, one's own thinking included, but may be posited by (or for) another thinking as a 'thinking object' whose thinking itself would, then, be thought of as a thing or event in the same (mythological) way.

²² The Dharma here means the Teaching, the Teaching of the Buddha-Shakyamuni, and the Teaching of the Buddhas past, present and future, while a dharma means here a wholesome state of consciousness.

²³ Though, unlike Krishna in **IV** and Vishnu in **VII**, the Buddha in **VIII** is not postulated as transcending the Dharma.

²⁴ This, of course, does not preclude the Buddha from being an external observer too, though in another, inner, context of the Dharma (Teaching).

§5

*The schemes of interpretation of events in the
Dhammapada and the Bhagavadgita*

The state of things (in *samsara*) as they are, is postulated in **VIII.1**, in terms of *action* (*karma*) reduced to *mental* action (*manas*) or thought (*citta*), and understood in the sense of *karma of thought* (*citkarma*). This postulate, itself neither mythological nor religious and suggesting a simple and direct interpretation of events in one's *present* life, is, however, linked with the religion of Buddhism, still very young at that time. For, as we see it in **VIII.3**, the worship (*pūjā*) of the Buddha and the Arhats figures here as accumulating far more merit (*puñña*) than traditional brahman-ical sacrifice (*yajñā*).

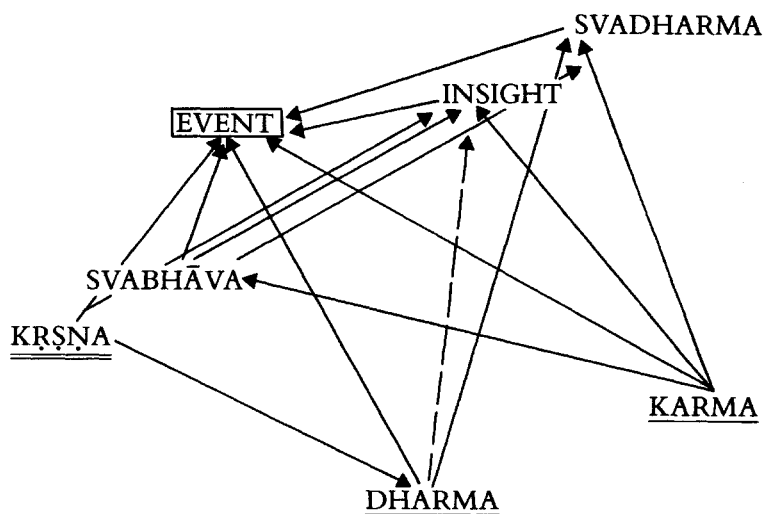
The following scheme of interpretation of *an event* in one's *present life* may give the reader a very general idea of how mythology, in the fairly hypothetical early historical Buddhism, was connected with religion and non-religion (e.g., *karma*) within one *situation of understanding*. An event here is *mental* (or a thought) by definition, because it can figure only as *already known*, or *thought* of. All other things (or events) are present as—past or present—factors which determine this event and one's (no matter whose) thinking of it. For comparison's sake one other scheme, that in the Bhagavadgita is added. (See opposite.)

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO ADDENDA

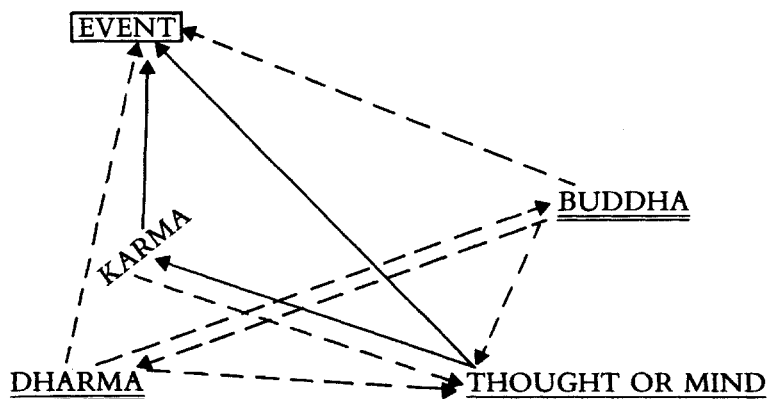
1. An event here (E) is an *object of thought*. This alone needs a lot of explaining. Let us start with the question: what are the events in our two cases?

In **VIII.1** it is very general and completely simple: one is unhappy (or happy), and then, why, how to account for one's being unhappy (or happy)? In **IV.2**, the event is very concrete and extremely complex: it is the great battle between Kauravas and Pandavas, and Arjuna's refusal to fight.

IV



VIII



An interrupted arrow shows that a factor from which it issues determines the character of an event or another factor, and not their existence. The underlined factors are independent in their existence from any other factors. The factors which exist outside the space of the scheme are doubly underlined.

These events are objects of thought in two different senses. First, an event can be understood as an object of thought in the sense of Husserlean *intentionality*, or ‘being conscious of it’, to which an object of thought is related as something merely formal and posited without (or prior to) any inquiry into its content, without any definition or interpretation. At this stage it is simply that of which ‘being conscious’ is about, the point to which thinking is being directed and the direction itself. Taken in this sense, an object of thinking would pretty nearly correspond to the Buddhist idea of a thing (or event) ‘as it is’ (*yathā bhūtam*), and an event, as an object of thinking, will remain, as it were, equal to itself, not being subject to any further, actual or possible interpretation. Suffering, in this case, is suffering, happiness is happiness, a battle is a battle, and Arjuna’s hesitation is Arjuna’s hesitation. You may call it, if you like, a *zero-interpretation* wherein the event in question is presented as if it were determined by itself.

2. Second, an event as an object of thinking, can be thought of in the sense of one or another interpretation that would interpret that event as determined by one or several factors other than itself. So, for example, Arjuna’s hesitation may be determined, in the sense shown in scheme **IV**, by his own character or nature (*svabhāva*, Sb), $E \leftarrow Sb$. Or it may be determined by karma (K), $E \leftarrow K$, as in scheme **VIII** one’s happiness or suffering are determined by one’s thought or mind (M), $E \leftarrow M$. [For brevity’s sake we will use simply *M*, *K*, and *Sb* instead of $E \leftarrow M$, $E \leftarrow K$, and $E \leftarrow Sb$, in such cases.] Sb, K and M are, in these interpretations, *simple single factors*. Simple and single in the sense that each of them determines an event singly and directly, without being itself determined by some factor, and without being combined with some other factor, or factors, within *one* interpretation.

3. However, these very factors (i.e., M, K and Sb) determining the same events (i.e., one’s suffering in **VIII** and Arjuna’s hesitation in **IV**) may, in their turn, be determined by some other factors or combine with them to form, thereby, *complex factors*. So, for instance, the event of one’s suffering²⁵ can be interpreted as determined by one’s corrupted mind (M) determining, in its turn, one’s ‘resulting karma’ (K), in which

²⁵ Suffering (*duḥkha*) as an event is very different from suffering as a Universal Principle (*lakṣaṇa*) in Buddhism. The first can be reduced to the second, but not the other way round.

case we will have $E \leftarrow K \leftarrow M$, or in abbreviated form, $K(M)$.²⁶ If the same event is interpreted as determined by one's corrupted mind which, in its turn, has already been determined by one's karma, then the picture will be $E \leftarrow M \leftarrow K$, or $M(K)$. Likewise, the event of Arjuna's hesitation already accounted for by his nature, *svabhāva* (Sb), could be also, and separately, explained as determined by his nature determined by karma, $E \leftarrow Sb \leftarrow K$ or $Sb(K)$. Moreover, if we address ourselves to the event of Arjuna's overcoming his hesitation and deciding to fight (in IV.3–4), it might be interpreted as determined by his own duty or law, *svadharma* (Sd) determined by the Universal Norm or Law, *Dharma* (D) determined, in the final account, by Krishna the Lord (Kr): $E \leftarrow Sd \leftarrow D \leftarrow Kr$, or simply $Sd[D(Kr)]$.

4. But one and the same event can be interpreted as determined by a combination of factors, simple and complex, which do not determine each other. Furthermore, in their co-determination they are related to each other absolutely synchronically in one's thinking of this event as an object of thought.²⁷ That is what makes such a combination of factors one *combined factor*. In this connection the event of one's uttering (reciting) Buddha's words in the Dhammapada may be interpreted as determined by a factor that combines in itself one's good karma resulting from one's purified mind, $K(M)$, the availability of Dharma through the Buddha, $B(D)$, the direct influence of Dharma in terms of the Turn of the Wheel of Dharma, D , and, possibly, the direct and immediate influence of Buddha, were he present at the time and in the place of the recital, B . Then the combined factor would be presented as $K(M)B(D)DB$. Similarly, the event of Arjuna's hesitation could be interpreted as determined by the factor combining his own nature determined by his karma, $Sb(K)$, the influence of Dharma determined by Krishna, $D(Kr)$, and the immediate presence of Krishna, $Kr.Sb(K)D(Kr)$ Kr .²⁸

5. None of these factors, however, could become, itself, subject to interpretation the way an event is interpreted. Because, the very idea of 'a factor determining an event' presupposes that the factor in question has already been an object of thought before the 'act' of interpretation

²⁶ The factor directly determining the event here is put before the brackets.

²⁷ 'One's' in this phrase means, again, intentionality in the sense of "being conscious of".

²⁸ It goes without saying that *not all* possible combinations of factors are allowed.

started, and necessarily refers to that which had been postulated somewhere else and at some other time.²⁹ In this sense we might assert that, for instance, the interpretation of the event of one's suffering as determined karmically by one's corrupted mind, i.e., $K(M)$, is based on the postulate of mentality or 'mental-ness' of dharmas. That is, the principle that all things and events are essentially mental has already been postulated, as well as the principle that it is one's mind that produces karmic effects, bad, good or indeterminate. But if the event to be interpreted, in the same passage, is the fact of Buddha's utterance of these lines, then it will be interpreted as either determined by the Buddha directly, $E \leftarrow B$ or B , or by the Dharma through Buddha $E \leftarrow B \leftarrow D$, or $B(D)$. In this case we are dealing with the principle that a Buddha is entirely *a-karmic* in his perpetuating and spreading the Dharma. At the same time the Dharma itself, i.e., not necessarily through the Buddha, conceived in the sense of its low and high ebbs (or Turns of the Wheel of the Dharma and intervals between them), may, in some cases, be considered as the factor determining the event of, say, perception or transmission of the text of the Dhammapada, in which case the interpretation of this event will be simply D .

6. Thus, for an event in **VIII** and an event in **IV**, we will have two sets or clusters of interpretations each of which is presented as a factor, or a combination of factors, determining a given event:

²⁹ The *act* of interpretation here is, of course, a metaphor, for it remains phenomenologically unclear *who* performs it, I as an external observer of these factors given in the text, or the intentionality of the text itself.

VIII

Simple single factors

1. E (zero-factor)

2. B

3. D

Simple single factors

4. M

5. K

Complex factors

6. B(D)

7. D(B)

8. M(K)

9. K(M)

10. M(B)

11. M(D)

12. M[B(D)]

13. M[D(B)]

Combined factors

14. BD

15. BM

16. BK

17. DM

18. DK

19. MK

20. BDM

21. BDK

22. BMK

23. DMK

24. BDMK

25. B(D)M

26. B(D)K

27. D(B)M

28. D(B)K

29. M[B(D)]K

30. M[D(B)]K

31. M[B(D)]K(M)

32. M[D(B)]M(K) etc.

IV

Simple single factors

1. E (zero-factor)

2. Kr

3. D

Simple single factors

4. I (*Insight-Jñāna*)

5. K

6. Sd

7. Sb

Complex factors

8. D(Kr)

9. I(Kr)

10. I(D)

11. I(K)

12. I(Sb)

13. Sd.(Sb)

14. Sd.(O)

15. Sd.(K)

16. Sb.(K)

17. I[D(Kr)]

18. I[Sb(K)]

19. Sd.[D(Kr)]

20. Sd.[Sb(K)]

Combined factors

21. Kr.D

22. Kr.I

23. Kr.K

24. Kr.Sd

25. Kr.Sb

26. DI

27. DK

28. DSd

29. DSb

30. IK

31. ISd

32. ISb

33. Sd.K

34. Sd.Sb

VIII

IV

- 35. Kr.D.I
- 36. Kr.DK
- 37. Kr.DSd
- 38. Kr.DSb

VIII

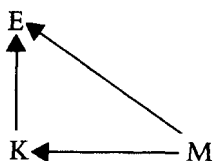
IV

Simple single factors

Simple single factors

- 39. DJK
- 40. DISd
- 41. DISb
- 42. IKSd
- 43. IKSb
- 44- ISd.Sb
- 45. KSd.Sb
- 46. Kr.DIK
- 47. Kr.DISd
- 48. Kr.DISb
- 49. Kr.DKSd
- 50. Kr.DKSb
- 51. DIKSd
- 52. DIKSb
- 53. DISd.Sb
- 54. DKSd.Sb
- 55. IKSd.Sb
- 56. Kr.I(D)
- 57. Kr.I(K)
- 58. Kr.I(Sb)
- 59. Kr.Sd.(D)
- 60. Kr.Sd.(K)
- 61. Kr.Sd.(Sb)
- 62. Kr.I[D(Kr)]
- 63. Kr.I[Sb.(K)]
- 64. Kr.Sd.[D(Kr)]
- 65. Kr.Sd.[Sb.(K)] etc.

7. In the scheme of **VIII** the 'space' of factors determining an event and one another is, as we see it, formed by interrupted arrows, indicating the complete indeterminacy of the existence of the factors, in the first place,



and the vagueness of borders limiting their sphere of action, in the second. The only factor which definitely determines the existence of an event here is thought or mind, *M*, that acts either directly, *M*, or through karma *K(M)*, or simultaneously in both ways, *MK(M)*. In fact, it is a kind of triangle formed by mind, karma of mind, and mental event, that serves, as it were, as a two-dimensional plan *within* the space of factors (see the scheme):

8. The third dimension of this space is formed by Buddha and Dharma that *do not cause anything to exist* while determining the character of mind and mental events, but even that they do optionally, so to speak. For both Buddha and Dharma, while acting within the sphere of factors, do not belong to it, being, as it were, on both sides of its border. [Buddha's Dharma, in this sense, is quite dissimilar to the Dharma of Krishna in **IV**. For the former, though not being subject to the Law of Interdependent Origination (*paticcasamuppāda*) and to karma, is *related* to the Buddha (and vice versa), while the latter is entirely determined by Krishna who is relative to nothing and whose being is absolute.]

9. Karma in **VIII**, being a purely relational notion, remains a factor determining an event only in so far as one's mind goes on working. Karma in **IV** is an entirely independent factor *within* the phenomenal universe (i.e., created by Krishna's *māyā*), and the corner-stone of the latter. Its role in the scheme of **IV** is analogous to that of mind in **VIII**, in this connection. But, while Krishna transcends the universe and karma as the created, the Buddha, in the uncreated universe, transcends mind (and, thereby, karma) because he has already become 'non-mental' (i.e., his mind has ceased to be a mind). For he was pushed by the impulse of Dharma outside the confines of the 'mental', i.e., the universe of mental events. Because, as we see in **IV.3.3**, Krishna dissolves the universe, periodically, whereas the Buddha leaves it for ever.

10. The idea of person is very different in both schemes, or rather, behind them, for it does not figure among the factors. Krishna, non-person by definition, makes a man a person through his Dharma (here a complex factor N8), *D(Kr)*, or by directly determining the event, *Kr*.

(N2). Or, as has already been noted, he makes it by pre-determining a man's death at the time when there was no time, and announcing it (in **IV.3**) before that man's actual death. This can be represented by the combined factors *Kr.Sd. [D(Kr)]* or *Kr.Sd.[Sb.(K)]*.³⁰ The Buddha, at least in Early Historical Buddhism, had been a Noble Person (*ariyapuggala*) before he discovered and preached the Four Noble Truths, and even before that he was a person in his previous rebirths as a Bodhisatta (in the Theravadin sense of the word).

However, if we confine ourselves to the scheme, that is, to the factors determining such events as suffering, happiness, worshipping the Buddha, etc., then we have to admit that a person here is, in the final account, a sentient being to which a given mental event is ascribed *at this very moment*. For the next moment may well be the moment of becoming an ascetic and a future, or even actual Arhat, that is, a non-person again. Then, according to the scheme of **VIII**, the factors determining such an event will be *B*, or *D*, or *B(D)*, or *D(B)*, etc. Or, in other words, we have here the factors which do not cause a person to *exist*—for one cannot be regarded as existent from the point of view of Buddha's Dharma³¹—and which determine only the direction and character of one's thinking.

³⁰ Krishna, after the Universe has been created, does not determine one's karma, but knows it and figures as the mightiest factor side by side with it.

³¹ And the Dharma is regarded as existent by mind, naturally.